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# **‘Dance’ of Chineseness: Negotiating Identities in London**

**Xia Lin**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD  
Middlesex University  
April 2014**

# **Abstract**

Based on the experiences of Chinese in London, this research has sought to respond to debates about the construction of ethnic identity. It explores how a diverse sample of Chinese people living in London define their identity and the extent to which they construct a shared notion of 'Chineseness'.

In-depth interviews and a focus group were carried out to explore meaning and sense-making of Chinese identity. Unlike most research on the Chinese in Britain which has studied subgroups of the Chinese, this project involved a diverse range of Chinese people with different backgrounds and experiences.

A striking feature of the findings is that the Chinese individuals managed to simultaneously hold on to a sense of an 'imagined community' while at the same time accommodating multiple attachments to cultures and places. The experience of being Chinese in London is a complex interplay between the seemingly bright boundary of 'community' and the blurry boundaries of multiple identities. It is a dynamic negotiation of these identities in different ways in different contexts. It also involves multiple attachments to different scales of home, not just to the Chinese nation but also places across countries at national and local levels. Chinese identity is a performance of negotiating identities in relation not just to the non-Chinese, but also to other Chinese people.

In this 'dance' of Chineseness, my own position as a recent migrant from China who speaks both Mandarin and Cantonese was crucial. I encountered shifting identifications by the participants in the course of the interviews, a process which may differ for researchers from other backgrounds. My supervisors, who are non-Chinese, also added important dimensions to the development of the study.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

*O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?  
(William Butler Yeats, 1926, Among school children, stanza VIII)*

This is a great dance of the chestnut tree as portrayed by the renowned Irish poet Yeats. Its leaf, blossom and bole sway to music, performing the dynamic movements. Can such a dance be separated from the dancer? The poet tells us that the dance is performed through the dancer and inseparable from it. So what is the essence of the tree? Is it the sum of its parts or the whole tree? And how is this dance performed?

Having these questions in mind, I present **the ‘dance’ of Chineseness** in this thesis. Is Chinese identity separable from Chinese people? Or is it performed through people and inseparable from them? Eriksen (2002:6) tells us that identity is ‘an ascribed aspect of their personhood from which they cannot escape entirely’. Bourne (1987:22, cited in Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992) also tells us that ‘what we do’ is ‘who we are’; ‘we do not need to seek out our identity for its own sake, but only to discover in the process “the universality inherent in the human condition”’. So I believe it is only through the performance of Chinese identity that a sense of being Chinese is understood. In this ‘dance’ of Chineseness, what is the essence of it? Is it some features of being Chinese or the whole defining characteristics of Chineseness? And how is the ‘dance’ performed? This thesis will explore these from the participants’ lived experiences of being Chinese in London.

The ‘dance’ of Chineseness illustrates the Chinese participants’ performance of Chinese identity through which they negotiate a sense of being Chinese in the host society. It portrays the construction of Chineseness as a theatrical performance, where ‘dancer’ interacts with ‘audience’ to perform a notion of Chineseness. The concept of ‘performance’ has been used by Erving Goffman (1959:22) to refer to the performative nature of identity construction through face-to-face interactions. He suggests that an individual often highlights a desired definition of the situation and encourages the audience to agree to it. In the performance of Chinese identity, people could negotiate their notion of Chineseness.

Miri Song and David Parker (1995) analyze the negotiation of identity in their research relationships with Chinese participants. They suggest that participants often use identity markers, notably including language, physical appearance and personal relationships, to define their commonalities and differences with the researcher. And:

[W]hile the perception of difference and/or commonality often occurs along these markers of cultural identity, the implications and effects of perceived differences and/or commonalities are somewhat variable and unpredictable. (Song and Parker, 1995:205)

Such dynamic construction of identity is strongly highlighted in the performance of Chineseness in this study. This research questions the notions that all Chinese share commonalities of what it is to be Chinese and are clearly different from other groups. I use the metaphor of 'dance' to illustrate how a sense of Chineseness is performed and negotiated.

Faist (2010) uses the term 'dance partners' to describe similar and yet different concepts of diaspora and transnationalism which will be explored later. In a different context, Lee (2004) names her books as 'dancing' with the families, underlining the fluid interaction between family therapist and families and between family members. I am inspired by the idea that 'dance' showcases the dynamic performance of a 'dancer' in front of their 'audience'. In analyzing individuals' negotiation of boundary and their idea of home, I use 'dance' to capture their shifting identifications of being Chinese and being 'others' in different contexts, as well as their changing ideas of where home is.

## **1.1 Exploring Chineseness**

In today's world, international migration has become a common phenomenon that influences everyday life. In Britain, the 2011 census (ONS, 2011) shows that the majority group in England and Wales - white British – have decreased from 87% to 80% of the total population during the last decade. Their percentage in London has reduced from 58% to 45%, which means there are more minorities than white British in London. Britain, especially London, is ethnically diversified.

The notion of ethnic minority suggests that there is a distinction between the indigenous group and ethnic minorities. Research reports that there are a decreasing proportion of people in Britain who think of themselves as primarily or exclusively British (Heath and Roberts, 2008). In contrast to the mainstream identity, some studies suggest that

minorities are 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2006:6) and members of a group share a notion of ethnic identity. They maintain a group boundary and an orientation to home regardless of their dispersion in space (Brubaker, 2005). Such a fixed notion of ethnic identities is what this study examines.

The Chinese, particularly the Chinese in London, have some notable features valuable for this investigation. They are visible in portraying cultural distinctiveness and meanwhile invisible through their absence from public life, residential scattering, mixed partnering and increasing diversifying of group members. It raises a question of whether a shared experience of being Chinese is constructed.

The Chinese are visible in portraying their cultural distinctiveness. Chinatown has been institutionalized, becoming an urban public space that showcases Chinese culture (Sales et al., 2009). Chinese takeaways have long been common in Britain's high streets, trading on the basis of cultural difference (Song, 1996; Parker, 1993). Chinese community organisations are set up in many, if not every, London borough. There are Chinese language weekend schools, teaching the younger generation basic Chinese skills and cultural practices. And a number of churches in London have separate services for the Chinese. All these seem to suggest a notion of a Chinese 'community'.

David Parker (2000:76-77) reviews two terms used in the UK to describe the Chinese, which are 'the Chinese in Britain' and 'the overseas Chinese'. He notes that these terms differ in a sense that the former emphasizes a successful cultural contribution of the Chinese in the British society, while the latter suggests these globally mobile people are able to carry with them a fixed sense of Chinese identity. Nevertheless, we could see a commonality between these two, which is a notion of a homogeneous Chinese 'community' well acknowledged in the British society. In Chinese language, Chinese people can define themselves as either 'Chinese nationals' ('hua qiao' in Mandarin) or 'overseas Chinese' ('hua ren' in Mandarin) depending on whether they have Chinese nationality or not. However, this distinction of self-definitions does not seem to complicate their perception of homogeneous Chineseness.

As well as presenting their cultural distinctiveness, the Chinese population has remained invisible on the policy agenda, in spite of the social exclusion faced by both many in the older generation and many more recent migrants (Yu, 2000; D'Angelo et al., 2010). Few Chinese people have reached national prominence in Britain and Chinese faces rarely appear in the mass media except in the context of 'overseas' news.

Additionally, the Chinese in Britain are largely mixed with the non-Chinese through their dispersion and mixed partnering. According to Simpson (2012), the 2011 Census shows that the Chinese are the most scattered and residually mixed of all ethnic minority groups in Britain. The Chinese in London is very scattered with substantial concentrations only in a small number of boroughs such as Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Southwark (ONS, 2011). As well as being dispersed, the Chinese have a higher rate of mixed partnering than some other minorities such as Bangladeshis and Pakistanis who tend to concentrate in certain geographic areas (Platt, 2010). In light of these mixings, the Chinese may appear invisible as a 'community'.

It is also worth noting that contemporary Chinese migration is diversified (Sales et al., 2009). The population who arrived during the first wave of Chinese migration are mainly from Hong Kong and often have a low level of education. A majority of them worked in service industry such as catering and laundry, and now they are at their retirement age. These people are mostly Cantonese speakers and a substantial number of them have remained monolingual. In terms of written Chinese, most of them use the traditional style of written Chinese. There are also British Born Chinese (BBCs) who are statistically doing well socio-economically (ONS, 2005, cited in Lam et al., 2009; Tackey et al., 2011). English tends to be their first language, although they might be bilingual or multilingual (Li, 2011). Their links to China and Chinese culture may be different from those of their parents. Most recently arrived migrants are from Mainland China and other Asian countries. Many of them speak Mandarin, read and write simplified Chinese, and tend to be better educated than the first generation migrants (Li and Zhu, 2010). They range from students and highly skilled migrants, to refugee, asylum seekers and undocumented. The diversity of the population hence questions to what degree there is 'a' coherent Chinese group in Britain today.

The aim of this study is to examine the extent to which Chinese in London share a notion of what it is to be Chinese. Through the experience of a diverse sample of Chinese people living in Greater London, this study addresses three sets of questions:

1. How do Chinese people construct ideas of 'Chineseness'?
  - What are the key ways in which they distinguish Chinese from others?
  - What are the defining characteristics of being a Chinese in London?
  - To what degree are these shared by all members of the Chinese diaspora?
2. How is Chineseness performed and understood in relation to Britishness?

How do the Chinese negotiate identity over time in different social contexts?

3. What are their conceptions of home?

How is the idea of home negotiated?

Using interviews and a focus group, this study explores the lived experiences of Chineseness. In-depth stories were collected from twenty-two participants who are diverse in their demographic, migratory, social and economic backgrounds. From these accounts, I learnt about their notion of Chinese identity and present a 'dance' of Chineseness in this thesis.

Studying Chineseness is also a personal interest for me as a Chinese person. I was born in China and came to Britain in 2004. Growing up in China and living there until my mid-twenties where there is a strong state discourse of homogeneity, I had an unquestioning acceptance of Chineseness as a unified identity. This notion had never been challenged until I came to Britain. Here in London, I work, live, study and socialize with different kinds of Chinese and non-Chinese people. Spending most of my adult life in this city has caused me to unpack my notion of Chineseness and the idea of ethnic identity. This research has been a major part of my life that has enabled me to do so.

My advantage in this research was my ability to speak two main Chinese dialects apart from English. It enabled me to collect in-depth accounts of established migrants, recent migrants and British Born Chinese. It was challenging to work with three different languages, especially in terms of translating, analyzing, and the use of NVivo software (which was restricted). But the large volume of rich data made my efforts so much worthwhile.

This research builds on other work in which I have been involved, which has noted the diversity of Chinese in Britain and their ambiguous notion of boundary and home (Lam et al., 2009; Sales et al., 2009). In addition, my MA dissertation on overseas Chinese students (Lin, 2007) addressed a lack of trust and support between the Chinese. From different perspectives, those studies argue the heterogeneity of the Chinese and start to question the shared notion of Chineseness. This research specifically focuses on the construction of identity and further examines this shared notion.

Studies in Britain on Chinese identity often focus on a specific element, such as food (Song, 1996; Parker, 1993, 2000), language (Li, 2011; Li and Zhu, 2010), Chinatown (Christiansen, 2003; Sales et al., 2009) and transnationalism (Pieke et al., 2004). Apart

from research on Chinatown which covers a range of Chinese people, most of these studies were interested in specific Chinese 'subgroups', such as British Born Chinese (Parker, 2000) or young people in general (Li, 2011; Li and Zhu, 2010; Parker, 1993), established migrants (D'Angelo et al., 2010; Yu, 2000), recent migrants (Lam et al., 2009; Lin, 2007), young people and their parents (Song, 1996), and people from the same place of origin (Pieke et al., 2004). My study aims to address a gap in the literature exploring whether there is a notion of Chineseness commonly shared among a variety of Chinese people, and if there is, how this shared notion is constructed.

This research focuses on the in-depth exploration of Chinese identification. It therefore does not aim at generalizing from experiences of Chinese population in London. This project involves people who fit into typical features of Chinese subgroups, such as Hong Kong established migrants who run a Chinese takeaway, a refugee from Vietnam, British Born Chinese whose parents came from Hong Kong, and students from China. In addition, this study includes individuals who do not fit into these typical features, such as an established migrant from China, a British Born Chinese whose parents were born in Kenya, a recent migrant from Belgium, and a woman who came from Vietnam when she was one year old. Obviously there are some other types of Chinese people who are not involved in this study, such as established migrants from Mauritius, refugee from China and second generation of Mainland Chinese migrants. Not being able to recruit every 'category' of the Chinese (if there is a fixed categorization) suggests the massiveness in diversity of the population and the need to explore the diverse experiences of Chineseness. The variety of backgrounds and experiences of the participants have enabled this study to explore such diverse experiences of Chinese identification.

## **1.2 Chinese migration**

The notion of Chineseness suggests that all Chinese share the same boundary and home regardless of where they dwell. This thesis will begin by challenging the ambiguity of such a notion by demonstrating the complexity of Chinese dispersion in space.

A 'diaspora' is always based on multiple individual journeys, which often involve complex trajectories (Sales et al, 2009). Members of a diaspora may differ in terms of generation of migration, place of origin, and motives and strategies of migration, which would lead to different forms of attachment to 'home'. Individuals may also differ in terms of social conditions and encounters in the place of settlement, challenging the maintenance of

'boundary'. Such complexity is evident in the dispersal of the Chinese diaspora.

### **1.2.1 Migration abroad**

The Chinese started their flows of migration from the third century when they predominantly moved from Southern China to neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia (Christiansen, 2003). Those destinations provided opportunities for poorer migrants who became mostly labourers, free settlers working in market gardening, plantations, rickshaw pulling and prostitution, and traders who set up business (Skeldon, 1996:438).

From the middle of the nineteenth century, for a hundred years, Chinese migration began to grow and establish (Skeldon, 1996; Wang, 1991). North America and Australia attracted many Chinese coolies who supplied labour for gold mining (Wang, 1991). The majority of the migrants were males who were expected to return home to their families or to marry after their time abroad (Skeldon, 1996). Later in 1882 in America, Chinese migration was halted by discriminatory immigration control. This event diverted more migrants towards Europe including Britain (Wang, 1991). In addition, the expansion of shipping enabled the settlement of Chinese sailors in ports around the world (Sales et al., 2009) including Liverpool in the UK. After the downfall of Imperial China in 1911, another flow of migration took place, where well-educated professionals left China for Southeast Asia. They provided tutoring for the children of earlier Chinese migrants in those countries (Wang, 1991).

By then, large and stable Chinese 'communities' had been established overseas. As Skeldon (1996) notes, the vast majority were in Southeast Asia. But the network was much more extensive, with communities established throughout America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, South Africa, North America and Australasia. Emigration from China was highly localized and controlled, through Hong Kong, Macau, and the ports from which foreign merchants were allowed to trade, particularly the Pearl River Delta area in Canton, Teochew in Canton and Amoy in Fujian (Skeldon, 1996:437).

As the Chinese migrated abroad, 'Chinatowns' have become a notable urban space which symbolizes Chineseness and cultural stereotypes (Christiansen, 2003; Sales et al., 2009). Chinatown conjures up a whole range of ideas, such as drugs and illegal activities in earlier years, and more recently being illiterate and low-skilled in some cases, and being open and offering to host society an image that corresponds to its expectations in other cases (Christiansen, 2003). It involves negotiation between the

Chinese and various parties such as local government, property developer and the Chinese state (Sales et al., 2009).

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, emigration from China was restricted and controlled. But there was considerable migration from China to Hong Kong, and people sent by Chinese government or educational institutions to socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and Tanzania (Skeldon, 1996:439). There were few destinations open to the Chinese in the 1950s, one of which was the UK (Skeldon, 1996). It allowed virtual free access to Commonwealth citizens to settle. A large number of farmers hence migrated from Hong Kong to the UK and established themselves as migrants in Britain's contemporary Chinese 'community' (Sales et al., 2009).

China's economic and political reforms since 1978 brought a new emigration regime (Pieke et al., 2004), where Chinese migration increased in volume and complexity (Skeldon, 1996). According to Skeldon, a number of ethnic Chinese migrated from Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam and settled in notably America, Australia and Canada. There has been a large legal flow from China to Hong Kong and Taiwan, and from those places, it became easier to migrate to other destinations. People also migrated from China directly to North America, Australasia and Europe in particular (Skeldon, 1996:442-451). Apart from the traditional destinations, the Chinese also started to migrate to places such as Southern Europe and Eastern Europe (Benton and Pieke, 1998).

Among these multiple movements, a large number of people left China for study and they became a large source of foreign students globally (Lin, 2007; Skeldon, 1996). Traders continue to set up businesses abroad; and an example of this is people from rural areas of Zhejiang Province, migrating to Italy and setting up businesses in catering and clothing (Pieke, 2004). In addition to the movements of the privileged, Chinese people also work as labourers in over one hundred countries (Skeldon, 1996). And there has been illegal flow to Western countries and some Asian destinations (Skeldon, 1996). A notable group are from coastal areas of Fujian Province, who have migrated towards New York City and Europe, and formed a large proportion of undocumented migrants, refugee and asylum seekers in Britain (Pieke et al., 2004).

### **1.2.2 Migration to Britain**



Chinese migration to Britain was sporadic until the first wave in the late 1950s (Lam et al., 2009). Before that peak, London had already been a main destination for the Chinese although not the first one. In the nineteenth century, when Chinese sailors first arrived in Limehouse, the docklands area of East London, they mainly ran restaurants and laundries (Lau, 2002). Those Chinese were seen as both exotic and dangerous, associated with risky activities such as drug taking and gambling (May, 1978). They were linked with stereotypical images of 'Fu Manchu' and 'Yellow Peril' and they encountered hostility and discrimination (Sales et al., 2009; Christiansen, 2003).

Shipping and the laundry business declined in the 1930s and the war-time blitz destroyed much of Limehouse (Sales et al., 2009). So as noted by Lam and colleagues (2009), during the 1950s, Chinese people began to move to Soho where London Chinatown is now. Soho was then a run-down and sleazy place, known as a notorious centre for sex clubs with low rents which made it viable to live and establish businesses there. The Chinese concentrated on catering and became a threat to other businesses (Lam et al., 2009:3). During the 1950s, a large flow of migrants arrived from Hong Kong. They were predominantly male, generally spoke little English, had limited employment opportunities outside ethnic business and therefore provided a cheap supply of labour for Chinatown's businesses (Sales et al., 2009:10).

As Soho later developed as a centre for entertainment, Chinatown attracted more non-Chinese people so the 'community' became established. With increased prosperity and secure legal status, the earlier migrants were able to bring families to join them (Sales et al., 2009:10). Although the population became less male dominated, women were largely confined to the private sphere, often speaking little English (Lee et al. 2002). Later on, families started to move out of Chinatown and establish businesses in other parts of London and across Britain (Lam et al., 2009). From the 1970s, they started to acquire a reputation for success, hard work, respectability, self-sufficiency (Sales et al., 2009:11) and a model minority (Wong, 2003).

The second wave of Chinese migration was more diversified in relation to place of origin, economic position and legal status. Lam and colleagues (2009) note that, during 1970s and 1980s, many Chinese refugees arrived from Vietnam. After political disturbances in Beijing in 1989, some students from China applied for political asylum in Britain. The transfer of sovereignty in Hong Kong in 1997 led to another wave of migration from Hong Kong (Lam et al., 2009:4). Chinese people also arrived from Malaysia, Singapore

and other Southeast countries, who are highly skilled working in sectors such as IT (Pieke, 2004).

The third wave of migration took place in the last decade where people from Mainland China become the largest group of Chinese migrants. Unlike those from Hong Kong whose colonial history gave them some familiarity with Britain, these people know little of Britain's social and institutional structures or its language. These migrants range from the most privileged to those who have no legal status and face difficult social situations (Pai, 2008). Highly skilled migrants, including professionals, entrepreneurs and government officers migrated individually or through official sponsorship (Pieke, 2004). A large number of students arrived from China to study (Lin, 2007). China's uneven economic expansion also created the conditions for less privileged migration flows (Sales et al., 2009). From the 1990s, farmers arrived from Fujian Province in Southern China. They were later joined by people from other regions notably Northeast China. These areas failed to attract capital investment arising from China's reforms and thus witnessed shrinking local industries, bringing problems associated with high unemployment (Lam et al., 2009:4). These people from China now provide a source of cheap labour for ethnic businesses, in spite of the growing official controls on the use of undocumented workers (Sales et al., 2009).

The contemporary Chinese population is generally perceived as doing well socio-economically. They achieve high income and good employment (Song, 2004). They make little claim on welfare benefits (Chau and Yu, 2001). And Chinese children are statistically known to be very successful in school examination (ONS, 2005, cited in Lam et al., 2009; Tackey et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the population also experiences social and economic exclusion especially if they speak little English (Chau and Yu, 2002; Lam et al., 2009).

In light of the diverse waves of migration, the Chinese population in Britain is highly diversified. The participants in this study, for instance, encountered different experiences of migration. Most focus group participants came from Hong Kong during the first wave of migration. Interviewees Peter and Lilly who left Vietnam in the 1970s arrived during the second wave of migration to seek asylum in Britain. Ying and Helen came from Hong Kong in the 1990s during the transfer of sovereignty in Hong Kong. Pan from Malaysia also migrated during the second wave. Furthermore, Sarah and Sally who recently came from China to study are part of the third wave of migration. Among the participants, some migrated to Britain directly from a Chinese place of origin while some

others are secondary migrants. Based on their different history of migration, economic position and legal status, people could vary in their experience in the host society and the ideas of 'home'. A homogeneous notion of Chineseness in terms of the fixed division between Chinese and others and the shared orientation to home could be questioned.

The Chinese population has rapidly increased. In England and Wales, the population increased from 247,403 (5% of the total population) in 2001 to 393,141 (7% of the total) in 2011 (ONS, 2011). That's about 58% increase within the ten years. As noted by Pieke (2005:27), new migrants 'may taint the carefully built image of Chinese in the receiving society'. This study therefore investigates the construction and negotiation of the notion of Chineseness within the contemporary population. It focuses on the experiences of Chinese in London, because London has the largest and most diverse Chinese population in Britain and one of the most established Chinese 'communities' in Europe (Sales et al., 2009).

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

The following chapter discusses key concepts which are related to the analysis of Chineseness. It will address debates about the identities of ethnic minorities, in terms of whether they are 'imagined communities' or if they have multiple attachments to cultures and places. It will then focus on the concepts of boundary and home on which the examination of Chineseness is based. These will be followed by a discussion of individual motivations and social organisations in shaping the construction of identity.

I then move on to discuss the methodology in Chapter 3. I note that this project involved twenty-two Chinese people who have diverse backgrounds and experiences. They vary in terms of socio-economic status, age, place of origin, generation of migration and time in the UK. They have different encounters in the host society and forms of attachment to 'home'. The chapter covers research design, research methods, data collection and data analysis. And reflections on my role and interactions in the fieldwork will also be analyzed.

Chapter 4 to 6 present the findings of the research, which are centred around the negotiation of Chinese identity in relation to boundary and home. An interesting finding was the participants' change of notion of Chineseness during our discussion. It shifted

from a 'bright' to a 'blurry' boundary of Chinese identity and from a notion of a shared home to multiple scales of home.

Addressing the change of identifications, Chapter 4 first describes how the participants started their conversation by portraying a 'bright' boundary of Chineseness and a shared connection to China. They constructed a notion of a Chinese 'community', perceiving that the distinction between the Chinese and the 'others' is unambiguous, and all Chinese share orientation to a home.

Such a fixed notion of Chineseness was however deconstructed as our discussions proceeded, and this is addressed in Chapter 5 and 6. Chapter 5 explores a 'blurry' boundary of Chineseness where the participants proclaim not just Chinese but also mainstream identity. It illustrates how individual backgrounds shape their shifting notions of 'us' and 'them', which is then followed by an analysis of individual motivations from which participants negotiate their identities. Chapter 6 demonstrates the multiple scales of home. It addresses the constructions of each home, the connectedness and fluidity of various homes, and the roles of nation-state and family in shaping the identifications.

I conclude this thesis in Chapter 7. I argue that although participants tend to perceive a shared notion of Chineseness, what it means to be Chinese for each individual needs to be understood through a complex 'dance'.

This study - 'dance' of Chineseness - seeks to capture the dynamic negotiation of identities. The reflexivity of the 'dance' underpins the discussion throughout the thesis. Drawing on the narratives of a diverse sample of Chinese people, the research explores and questions the essence of Chinese identity. This 'dance' also involved my supervisors who are non-Chinese and me a Chinese researcher. Demonstrating this joint 'dance', this thesis discloses the lived experiences of being Chinese in London.

## Chapter 2: Understanding Chineseness

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses key concepts which underpin the thesis. In examining to what extent all Chinese share the notion of what it is to be Chinese, I draw upon the notion of Chineseness as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006:6) defined by apparent homogeneity and difference from others. As Anderson (2006:6) argues, 'classical communities' such as the Chinese are perceived as strong in their 'confidence in the unique sacredness of their ... admission to membership'. They are distinguished 'by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson, 2006:13). The distinctiveness of an 'imagined community' is expressed through the concept of diaspora, which formulates a population as a transnational community (Anthias, 1998). There is an idea that even though diaspora are dispersed in space, they share a group boundary and orientation to a 'homeland' (Brubaker, 2005:5). Such a fixed notion of ethnic identity, according to some scholars, can be used by ethnic minorities to escape from uncertainty (Hall and Gay, 1996) and resist social exclusion (Castles and Miller, 2009) in the host society.

Although the concepts of community, ethnicity and diaspora are commonly used, they are widely debated (e.g. Anthias, 2001; Alexander et al., 2007; Brah, 1996), including in relation to the Chinese (e.g. Christiansen, 2003; Sales et al., 2009). Anthias (1998:577) argues that concepts of ethnicity and diaspora need to be problematised. These concepts depend heavily on the attachment to 'homeland' and 'origin' as a basis of unifying identity. And Anthias (1998) argues that there is a lack of attention to intra-group divisions such as gender and class. Dufoix (2008:55-56) also notes that there is an 'illusion of essence' which assumes the homogeneity of diaspora; an 'illusion of community' that perceives diaspora as a 'community'; and finally, an 'illusion of continuity' which assumes the continued existence of diaspora. Diaspora is therefore much more heterogeneous than is generally assumed (Yuval-Davis, 2003).

As we shall see, many studies have drawn attention to the ambiguity of ethnic identities. In relation to Asian Americans, Song (2005) comments that such a term holds no automatic resonance for many people who are officially placed into the category. The notions of integration and assimilation (Alba, 2005) suggest that minorities can obtain a mainstream identity. Some scholars also suggest that people's life will never again be

limited to just one place (Pieke et al., 2004) because they can find home elsewhere (Brah, 1996).

Miri Song (2005:63) however warns that not all diasporic people are equally successful in asserting hybridized identities or occupying and enunciating a 'third space'. Focusing on the construction of Asianness in the US, she argues that:

The politics and dynamics of diasporic peoples' ethnic affiliations and identifications are far more constrained and subject to negotiation than suggested by the rather breezy and celebratory writings about diaspora and hybridity. (Song, 2005:63)

The same standpoint is claimed by Eleonore Kofman (2005) who draws upon the European context and questions the celebratory tone. She notes that:

Too much of the celebratory writing ... is ... based on the entitled and privileged subject, who enjoys unfettered movement, effortlessly consumes different cultures and places and is free to proclaim multiple identities. (Kofman, 2005:94)

So responding to the debates about whether ethnic minorities are 'imagined communities' or if they have multiple attachments to cultures and places, this study explores the negotiation of Chinese identity and examines the extent to which Chinese people in London construct a shared notion of Chineseness. Since the notion of identity centres around the constructions of group boundaries and home (Brubaker, 2005), this study analyzes negotiation in terms of these two aspects.

This chapter first reviews the literature in relation to boundary including boundary negotiation (Zolberg and Long, 1999; Alba, 2005) and the concept of positionings (Song and Parker, 1995). It then goes on to discuss the notion of home, illustrating the multiple scales of home (e.g. Wang and Wong, 2007; Ong and Nonini, 2004) and how spaces are linked transnationally and translocally. Lastly, this chapter draws attention to the individual motivations of obtaining normality (Goffman, 1972) and needs (Maslow, 1943) and the role of nation-state and family in shaping the negotiation of identities.

## **2.2 Boundary**

The discussion of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006:6) draws attention to the significance of boundaries in the construction of collective identities. This section will discuss the concept of boundary specifically in terms of its negotiation and positionings.

### **2.2.1 Boundary negotiation**

In their work on migrants, Zolberg and Long (1999) argue that the construction and negotiation of identity take place through a dialectical process of incorporation at the boundary of 'us' and 'them'. 'Social boundaries have been understood as essential to ethnic phenomena since the pioneering investigations of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth' (Alba, 2005:20). A boundary 'involves both difference, and the meaning put upon difference' (Wallman, 1978:202). As Alba (2005) argues, relatively little work has been done to theorize the nature of boundaries and the processes that affect them.

'The nature of the minority-majority boundary depends on the way in which it has been institutionalized in different domains' (Alba, 2005:22). The boundary of difference is defined through particular 'identity markers' (Anthias, 2001:633) such as physiognomy, colour, food, language and dress. Through sharing these key characteristics, a migrant 'community' defines a shared sense of 'us' in opposition to 'them' such as the host society. Physical appearance is frequently evoked to mark a boundary of identity (Alba, 2005). Such construction of biological difference produces racial discourses and signifies social effects (Anthias, 2001). The 'racial' visibility (Ang, 1998) of the Chinese is frequently defined through the attribute of 'yellow skin', although this difference may not be so significant for western people who mostly consider the shape of the eyes to be the distinguishing feature (Sales et al., 2011). Food and eating is another key marker of collective identity. It encounters the need for retaining a sensual memory of another place and time (Highmore, undated:1). As noted by Parker (2000) in his study of Chinese takeaways, food is important for assigning value to Chinese culture. Language may also be a key boundary marker in defining ethnic identity, and the Chinese are considered to have 'unique sacredness of their language' (Anderson, 2006:6). Language is the means by which people are socialized into the collective culture. So through language, Chinese heritage is received, and by language, it is formed again and passed to the following generation (Tannenbaum and Howie, 2010).

Given these established boundaries, how do migrant communities negotiate their belonging within host societies? Zolberg and Long (1999:8-9) have developed a typology of three distinctive forms of boundary incorporation - 'individual boundary crossing', 'boundary blurring' and 'boundary shifting':

Individual boundary crossing, without any change in the structure of the receiving society and leaving the distinction between insiders and outsiders unaffected. This

is the commonplace process whereby immigrants change themselves by acquiring some of the attributes of the host identity.

Boundary blurring ... affects the structure ... of the receiving society. Its core feature is the tolerance of multiple memberships and an overlapping of collective identities.

Boundary shifting, which denotes a reconstruction of a group's identity, whereby the line differentiating members from non-members is relocated, either in the direction of inclusion or exclusion. ... Boundary shifting can occur only after substantial boundary crossing and boundary blurring have taken place. (Zolberg and Long, 1999:8-9)

'For contemporary immigration societies ... the distinction that has greatest relevance is between boundary crossing and blurring' (Alba, 2005:23). Examples of boundary crossing include naturalization and replacing one's ethnic language with the host language. Examples of boundary blurring include the possibility of dual nationality and public bilingualism (Zolberg and Long, 1999:8-9). Chinese immigrants would cross the boundary as they obtain British citizenship and abandon their original citizenship. When Chinese youths 'pick and mix' amongst the multiple languages (Li, 2011:1228), they imply a pattern of boundary blurring. The difference between crossing and blurring is whether or not people can claim both immigrant and host identities.

'How ethnic individuals, parts of ethnic groups, or even entire groups narrow the social distance that separates them from the mainstream depends on the nature of the boundary' (Alba, 2005:24). According to Alba, boundary crossing takes place at a bright boundary, and boundary blurring occurs at a blurry one. A boundary is 'bright' when 'the distinction involved is unambiguous, so that individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on' (Alba, 2005:22). A boundary is 'blurry' when it 'allows for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary'; so that 'individuals are seen as simultaneously members of groups on both sides of the boundary or that sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other' (Alba, 2005:22-25). 'There has been an increased empirical interest' in the ambiguous zone of the boundary (Eriksen, 2012:5), but based on Eriksen's review, this seems to so far focus on people of mixed origins.

Alba (2005) and Zolberg and Long's (1999) studies both identify a rupture in the process of boundary crossing. They argue that during the change from 'not us' to 'part of us', tensions often occur. Individuals face social and psychic burdens such as distance from peers, feelings of disloyalty and anxieties about whether they are accepted by a group. An example Alba (2005:24) quotes is that 'minority students who attempt to be



successful in school may be stigmatized for “acting white”, rejected by their peers for disloyalty, while at the same time risking discrimination at the hands of white students and teachers’. With regard to boundary blurring, Alba (2005) argues that individuals ‘do not sense a rupture between participation in mainstream institutions and familiar social and cultural practices and identities; and they are not forced to choose between the mainstream and their group of origin’. An example is used from American history, where the Northern European settlers preserved their cultural elements while continually incorporated into the mainstream (Alba, 2005:25). These arguments in relation to boundary blurring will, however, be revisited in this research.

Alba (2005:23) claims that ‘if ... boundary crossings happen on a large scale and in a consistent direction, then the social structure is being altered’. The bright boundary could then become blurry. Although in the main, boundary crossings are the actions of minorities, the emergence of fusion in minority culture could ‘point to boundary crossings on the part of individuals from the host majority’. ‘This may contribute to the incorporation of immigrants in general in creating buffer zones of indifference to elements of imported culture’ (Zolberg and Long, 1999:9-10). Boundary negotiation hence ‘involves some combination of boundary crossing, boundary shifting, or boundary blurring’ (Zolberg and Long, 1999:13).

Zolberg and Long (1999) and Alba (2005) analyze the boundary negotiation of minorities at a macro level. They draw less attention to individual experiences at a micro level. Do members of an ethnic ‘group’ share the same boundary for which they are considered as a ‘community’? What identity markers do they use to define their difference in everyday encounter? How do they negotiate the boundary? These questions suggest a need to explore individuals’ experiences of boundary negotiation, and this study will address this in the Chinese context.

### **2.2.2 Positionings**

The concept of positionings is very useful in analyzing the individual experiences of identification. Positioning highlights the multi-layered and shifting nature of identification as suggested by many researchers (Anthias, 2001; Aspinall et al., 2008; Bhabha, 1994; Edwards et al., 2012). Analyzing their research experience, Song and Parker (1995:244) use the term ‘positionings’ to stress the boundary negotiation between interviewees and the researcher which shifts in accordance with time and individual backgrounds. This study is guided by the notion of ‘positionings’ and it extends this by connecting it to

Zolberg and Long (1999) and Alba's (2005) studies of boundary negotiation. The positionings of Chineseness will be visualized by the shifts of individual locations with respect to the boundary. These shifting locations can indicate an individual's crossing or blurring of the boundary. So, by pinpointing an individual's 'positionings' at the boundary, the process of boundary negotiation can be vividly illustrated.

The particular characteristics of individual backgrounds that shape the 'positionings' of identity could include place of origin, generation of migration, religion, sexuality, gender and partnering. In terms of place of origin and generation of migration, it was discussed in the last chapter that Chinese people differ in terms of these backgrounds. It leads to their different forms of attachment to 'home' and encounters in the host society, and therefore experiences of being Chinese in Britain.

In addition, research (e.g. Tweed, 2006; Ryan et al., 2008) suggests that religion provides support for diaspora and shapes their identity. Tweed (2006) argues that religion makes homes for diaspora by providing them with various needs. In Britain, Christianity is the main religion, but the 2011 census (ONS, 2011) shows a decline within this decade in the number of people who identify themselves as Christian (from 71.7 per cent to 59.3 per cent), an increase in those not associating with any religion, and an increase in other religious groups. The dominance of Christianity appears to be gradually replaced by the diversity of religious belief. In Britain, there are many Chinese churches which are managed by a mainstream Anglican church. There are also a small number of Chinese Buddhist temples. These temples seem to be separated from the structure of mainstream religion and be supported or managed by a ministerial bureaucracy overseas. Does religion affect the construction of Chinese identity? If it does, how does it take place? Existing studies on the Chinese in Britain do not seem to explore this religious perspective of identification.

Furthermore, the ethnic boundary 'is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specifying ethnic identity'; 'communal boundaries often use differences in the way women are socially constructed as markers' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:113). Yuval-Davis (1997:37) notes that women's membership is of a double nature: on the one hand, women, like men, are members of the collectivity; on the other hand, they are always expected to follow specific rules. Women are not only the biological reproducers of an ethnic group, but are also expected to be the cultural keepers and carriers of identity (Castles and Miller, 2009). Specific rules are applied to women in various ways, such as dress style, lifestyle, language and sexual behaviour

(Ryan, 2010). As argued by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), ethnic norms may become restrictions and pressures for women.

In Chinese culture, up until the early 20th century, there was a custom of foot binding where feet of young girls were painfully bound tight to prevent further growth. This practice was commonly followed, regardless of class and any other social status. Ma (2010) argues that this was carried out by the mother to satisfy the father, who demanded the daughter to become a valuable, marriageable and physically beautiful bride. In other words, it was done so she would fit into the extremely patriarchal society. Developing from such a tradition, Chinese women tend to have less control over resources and decision making in the family (Tinker and Summerfield, 1999). Men especially elder men often have the authority. This can be demonstrated in Nonini's (Ong and Nonini, 2004:213) study in relation to Chinese in Malaysia. He observes that older men in a family have the power to decide where the female and younger family members should reside both in Malaysia and beyond. And they are able to command family economic resources to do so. Gender hence plays an important role in their construction of transnational identities.

Barber (2011:260; under review) observes that gender discourses on Far East Asian groups in Western societies are less extensively studied. Drawing on her research on British-born Vietnamese in Britain, she states that constructions and images of Oriental sexualities tend to position men disadvantageously. This shapes the participants' attitudes towards the opposite sex and their possibilities for developing intimate relationships with East Asian men and women. A detailed investigation of gendered identification is beyond the scope of this paper and this study focuses on capturing the core themes of Chineseness rather than focusing on a specific aspect. But this research attempts to address a gender perspective, specifically exploring what key rules are applied in relation to gender, whether women's traditional role is retained by overseas Chinese, and if so, in what form.

Hibbins's (2005:178-179) study points to the importance of considering sexuality as a dimension of identity in migration research. While male, heterosexual Chinese migrants did not appear to value the local, Australian variants of masculinity, associated with physicality, sport and alcohol, Hibbins found that gay Chinese men had quite different experiences and aspirations. Generally marginalised through racism and homophobia, nonetheless, the gay Chinese males in the study tended to adopt a form of masculinity more in tune with local, Australian emphasis on well muscled and fit bodies. This finding

again highlights the diversity of experiences within the Chinese diaspora.

Finally, partnering, which I refer to as having married or unmarried partnership, can influence the idea of belongingness. Edwards and colleagues (2012) argue that mixed partnering could put the entire rationale and means of classifying difference under scrutiny. This potentially questions the maintenance of the boundary. According to the 2011 Census (ONS, 2011), one million (6%) households in the country have mixed ethnicity partnerships, and these households concentrate in areas with the greatest population from ethnic groups such as London. Analyzing data from the Labour Force Survey, Platt (2010) suggests that, due to the geographic dispersion of the Chinese, their rate of mixed marriage is higher than some minority groups which are geographically concentrated such as Pakistanis and Bangladeshi. So how do the Chinese in London perceive same-race and mixed-race partnering? How do these two forms of partnering shape individuals' definition and negotiation of Chineseness? These issues were raised by some of the participants and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Studies of the Labour Force Survey (Coleman, 1994; Muttarak, 2004; Luk, 2008; Platt, 2010) agree on a gender difference of mixed marriage with regard to the Chinese. Chinese men have a lower rate of mixed marriage compared with women. This makes the Chinese different from most other ethnic groups in Britain where men often have a higher rate of mixed marriage. Chinese women, on the other hand, have the highest rate of mixed marriage of all ethnic group and gender, only second to the mixed population (Muttarak 2004; Platt, 2010). Responding to this phenomenon, Coleman (1994; see also Luk, 2008 and Muttarak, 2004) points out the difficulty in finding an explanation. Song (2009) suggests it may link to a perception that oriental men are considered as sexually undesirable and emasculated. Qian (1999) and Sung (1990) (both cited in Muttarak, 2004) study the same pattern in America; they explain that oriental women are perceived as having an attractive physical appearance and tolerance of traditional power relationships in marriage. But as Muttarak (2004) comments, their arguments have not been empirically tested.

Hsu and Ip (2006) study gender expectations of Taiwanese people in Australia. They argue that men have less flexibility and acceptance towards a non-Taiwanese partner, because they have the responsibility for maintaining bloodline in the extended family. Women, on the other hand, are seen as belonging to the husband's family once they are married, and their mixed marriage could gain 'face' for the family (Hsu and Ip, 2006:72). Although their study only looks at a sub-group of the Chinese, it highlights culturally

shaped gender differences in attitudes to mixed partnering which was also mentioned by the participants in this study.

## **2.3 Home**

In addition to boundary, home is the other element of identity examined by this research. Space and place are the primordial elements of diaspora (Ma, 2003). The intersections of movements deployed within a place create a 'practised place' called 'space' (De Certeau, 1980:117, cited by Fortier, 2000). Belonging can be attached to places and spaces, where a notion of home is constructed. As Brubaker (2005) notes, orientation to home provides the diaspora with a source of value, identity and loyalty.

History has witnessed the overcoming of spatial barriers and changing experiences of space (Parker, 2000). The development of transport and communicative technologies has intensified people's connections with place and the diaspora's complex processes of dispersion disrupt the notion of home. This section will review the construction of home, followed by the discussions of the transnational and translocal connections of space.

### **2.3.1 Homemaking**

This thesis refers to the construction of home as 'homemaking'. Blunt and Dowling (2006:254) note that home is where 'physical location and materiality, feelings and ideas are bound together and influence each other'. In a way, home involves material representations and symbolic meanings.

The meaning of home is multidimensional. Home can be considered as a 'stable physical centre of one's universe - a safe and still place to leave and return to ... and a principal focus of one's concern and control' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998:6). It is often linked with 'pleasant memories, affectionate situations ... and protective security' amongst family and loved people (Sarup, 1996:2). Having a distinctive capacity for memorising and anticipation, home could respond to outside pressures and allocate materials to fulfil needs (Mack, 1991). These may explain the importance of home for human beings, especially for diasporas who are likely to experience tensions and insecurity more. Detaching the meaning of home from a physical place, Rushdie (1991) views home as imaginary homelands stored in the mind. From another perspective, Berger (1984) commented that, it seems as if homelessness is coming to be the destiny

of the world, but it is rather that there develops another sense of being-in-the-world. Home is the story of a life being lived in the movement (Berger, 1984:64). As Rapport and Dawson (1998:33) also note, 'it is in and through the continuity of movement that human beings continue to make themselves at home'. Place and space are continuously negotiated and renegotiated (Stoller, 2002), and so is the construction of home. As noted in Blunt and Dowling's (2006) study, home can entail multiple scales such as a household scale and a transnational scale. In a way, research (e.g. Brah, 1996; Pieke et al., 2004) seems to suggest that people can feel at home anywhere in the global world.

Somerville (1992:532) defines the meaning of home into seven dimensions: home as shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode and paradise. These dimensions range from a material form ('shelter' as a roof over one's head), through a sense of emotional security ('heart' as affectionate social relations) and a source of identity ('roots' as one's belonging to a culture), to an idealization of all the positive features of home fused together ('paradise' as distinct from the home of everyday life). Based on Somerville's (1992) conceptualization, Wang and Wong (2007:194) study the meaning of home in relation to the Indonesian-born Chinese in Hong Kong. They suggest that home for those Chinese is being pulled into three directions: Hong Kong as 'functional home', Indonesia as 'emotional home' and China as 'ancestral home'. These three dimensions of home are symbolized by abode, heart and root respectively.

Home used to specifically refer to the village of origin in China for the Chinese, where their ancestors were buried and where they were supposed to return either physically or spiritually (Wang and Wong, 2007). To return home, the bodies or bones of Chinese migrants who died overseas were sent back to China for proper burial (Sinn, 1989, cited in Wang and Wong, 2007). This fixed notion of home has been deconstructed and some studies have discussed multiple dimensions of home for the Chinese in places like Malaysia (Ong and Nonini, 2004), Hong Kong (Wang and Wong, 2007), Germany (Leung, 2007), Europe (Pieke et al., 2004) and the US (Chang, 2002, cited in Wang and Wong, 2007).

Ang (2001) observes that Indonesian Chinese were not considered Chinese in China. And although this brief return to the homeland was not successful, their Chineseness is always a major identity preoccupation when they settle in Hong Kong. Wang and Wong (2007) also address the idea of home in relation to this large Indonesian Chinese community in Hong Kong. They argue a state of 'unavoidable ruptures' which this study questions:

Whenever migrants leave their original home, unavoidable ruptures within home begin to appear. ... Home thus becomes divided and unstable, and the rupture deepens as the migrant journey continues, creating unsettled anxiety in the hearts of migrants. (Wang and Wong, 2007:185)

Compared with the above studies of the Chinese, this research includes Chinese people from a much greater variety of diasporic backgrounds. They include people who were born in different overseas countries and the British Born who are second or third generation. In light of such diversity, these Chinese in London provides a valuable sample to examine the notions of community and multiple identities of the Chinese diaspora.

For the Chinese in Britain, it is suggested by Sales and colleagues (2011) that China is a home and people take pride in Chineseness due to China's development. But when the notion of home involves loyalty to the Chinese state, those who do not wish to claim loyalty or who are deemed unacceptable to the state will withdraw their belonging to this 'home' (Sales et al., 2011:214). In addition, Chinatown could be a 'home away from home' but research suggests that this space can be constructed differently by individuals (Sales et al., 2009:26). Furthermore, Chinese community organisations are a spatial focus place for often socially excluded people although not necessarily for the rest of the Chinese (Lam et al., 2009). The diversity of migratory experiences meant that the participants in this study have varying and complex experiences of home.

### **2.3.2 Transnationalism and translocality**

Connecting multiple places and spaces, transnational and translocal links can be created. The concepts of transnationalism and diaspora are interconnected and different. Faist (2010:33) suggests that they share 'an agency-orientated, processual view of cross-border social phenomena', but 'diasporic phenomena can be conceived as a subset of transnational social formations'. Transnationalism has a broader scope. And transnationalism can be an individual experience while diaspora is a collective phenomenon. Using the metaphor of 'dance', Faist (2010:9) addresses how these two concepts are overlapped and separated. Brickell and Datta (2011) state that transnationalism is often seen from social networks and economic exchanges between nations. In this context, migrants develop identities linked to multiple countries (Castles and Miller, 2009).

Nonini (Ong and Nonini, 2004:213-221) investigates transnational ties for small-scale

Chinese capitalist families in Malaysia. He observes that the business owners often send grown-up children overseas for education and eventually employment, and this sets up a transnational connection between Malaysia and where the children reside. Leung (2007:210) focuses on the Chinese in Germany. She highlights their experience of 'transnationalised home' where Chinese travel agencies create, sustain and redefine such ties. Chang (2002:142-144, cited in Wang and Wong, 2007) studies the notion of home for Taiwanese migrants in America. These migrants develop a 'transnational home identity' where Hsinchu, Taiwan and Silicon Valley, USA are both homes. And Pieke and colleagues (2004:17) study transnational connections of Chinese in Europe who migrated from Fujian Province of China. They argue that it is impossible to understand the dynamics of Chinese 'communities' without embedding them in the developments taking place in China. Compared with those studies, the participants in this research seem to construct more scales of home which will be analyzed in this paper.

Feeling a part of transnational phenomena cannot be taken for granted. Parker and Song (2009:596) observe in their study on British Born Chinese that some respondents spent time working in East Asia and shared their experiences on British Chinese forums. Their research shows that those BBCs' particular social location in cities like Hong Kong and Shanghai as neither white expatriate sojourners nor exiles returning 'home' accentuates their sense of being British Chinese.

From the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, research has drawn attention to local identities that play an important role in the construction of cultural practices (Halilovich, 2012). Appadurai (1995:216, cited in Smith and Eade, 2009) uses the term 'translocality' to stress the impact of transnational processes in shaping certain localities. Separate transnational phenomena such as migratory flows, trade, transnational communities and media can be put together, creating complex conditions for the production and reproduction of a locality (Pieke et al., 2004). Alan Smart and Josephine Smart, in Smith and Guarnizo's (1998:15) book, explore the social networks of entrepreneurial Hong Kong capitalists. They suggest that in order to successfully penetrate different localities in the world economy, they have to justify their activities within prevailing local understandings. Hence, transnationalism can be considered as a multi-local process (Brickell and Datta, 2011).

Michael Peter Smith, in Smith and Eade's (2009) book, also recognizes that the sustainability of transnational ties is reliant on local identification. But he places greater emphasis on the aspect of emplacement that translocalities are the places where mobile



subjects are locally grounded. Translocalities are connected through transnational flows to other distant places. They are not simply places of origin or of destination, but are significant and meaningful stops among people's diverse transnational routes (Smith and Eade, 2009:62).

So with regards to the Chinese participants in this study, where is home for them? How do their homes connect? Does the notion of home shift in any circumstances? What are the social conditions that create a home? These will be the focus of this study's analysis of home.

## **2.4 Negotiating identities**

This research explores the negotiation of Chineseness in relation to boundary and home in order to examine a shared notion of Chineseness. In comparison to the idea of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006:6), a concept of cosmopolitanism (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002) is used in the literature to suggest that certain people can be 'open to the variety of global cultures and can participate equally at all levels of society from the local to the global' (Kofman, 2005:84). There is however a class dimension in this notion, and according to Kofman (2005:83-85), it is often associated with the comfortable culture of middle-class travellers, intellectuals and businessmen, and such a notion has been critiqued for its failure to explore the everyday lives of migrants. Kennedy (2004), for instance, investigates the friendship networks of transnational professionals in building design. He suggests that these people fail to seriously engage with host cultures because of their long working hours, heavy demands of the work and the fact that many local colleagues are locked into separate non-work social milieus. Werbner (1999) explores the multiple global links of working-class and middle-class migrants such as the South Asian in the UK. She finds class plays an important part in shaping the links, not just through work and business but also marriage strategies. So based on their limited economic resources and cultural capital, some people may not be able to pursue a cosmopolitan disposition (Kofman, 2005).

Research suggests that ethnic identity is a social construct that entails symbolic meanings and material representations (e.g. Anthias, 2001; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Identity and belonging can be expressed in terms of citizenship, 'racial' belonging and cultural identity. Citizenship encompasses civil, political and social rights (Marshall, 1950) that diaspora are entitled to in a society. 'Racial' belonging (Perry, 2011) is socially

constructed to represent diaspora's genetic difference from 'the other'. A cultural identity (Giddens, 1989, cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997) expresses the group's difference in terms of ways of life. It may be argued that concepts of belonging and identity have certain differences. According to Yuval-Davis (2003), belonging includes identity and citizenship, and identity relates to an emotive aspect of belonging. But this study draws on a broad sense of belonging and identity rather than focusing on the difference between these terms.

Yuval-Davis (2003) argues in relation to a macro level that diasporic belonging is multi-layered, shifting and dynamic. Focusing on individual level, Barber's (2011) research reveals complex and fluid processes of identity construction. The dynamism encountered by British-born Vietnamese people in Barber's research is also experienced by my participants who include not just British born but also migrants from different backgrounds.

So what drives the individuals to construct and negotiate a sense of identity? We will look at two major factors in this section: individual motivations and social organisations.

#### **2.4.1 Individual motivations**

Individual actions could be motivated by multiple criteria including biological, social, psychological and situational factors (Maslow, 1943). This study will explore what influences an individual's sense of belonging in different situations. This analysis will be guided by both Goffman (1972) and Maslow's (1943) frameworks, although acknowledging that they do not apply their analyses to diasporic identity.

Erving Goffman (1972) suggests that in our social interaction, certain rules are learnt and followed where the social situation is made sense of and becomes 'normality'. These rules are often taken-for-granted, and only when they are ruptured do we become aware of them (Goffman, 1972:49).

'Normality' could be understood as an individual motivation for identifications. Research suggests that minority groups may appear different in a host society through physical appearance or dress style; they might speak a different language and follow different cultural practices (Castles and Miller, 2009). The environment in the host society may become unfamiliar to them. So while certain rules are taken-for-granted, some others are ruptured. Individuals may get confused about their place and how to be accepted by

others (Hall and Gay, 1996). A desire to fit in and become 'normal' could be strong. The notion of normality therefore helps to understand what takes place when individuals encounter ethnic differences in the host society. Ryan (2010) uses this concept in her study of transnational migration. She argues that the continuity with former frames of reference and adaptation to new rules can both be considered as a quest for normality.

To feel 'normal' in the society, people constantly make decisions of what former rules to retain and what new rules to adapt to. To analyze individual motivations behind such an action of obtaining normality, I apply Abraham Maslow's (1943) framework of a hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) argues that a hierarchy of needs motivate people's action, which include (from a low to a high level) physiological needs, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization. 'Physiological' needs refer to the body's automatic efforts to maintain a constant and normal state of balance and refer to requirements such as food, water, shelter and warmth. 'Safety' needs are about sustaining a safe, predictable and organized social situation and relate to feeling secure and free from fear. The next level refers to the needs for 'love' concerning affection and belongingness where affectionate relations and a place in a group are attained. 'Esteem' needs refer to self-respect and the respect of others. The needs for 'self-actualization', at the highest level, are where the full personal potential of the individual takes place (Maslow, 1943:372-382).

Maslow (1943) notes that when needs at one level are relatively well gratified there emerges a new set of needs at a higher level. But when these needs are not well satisfied, the drive for meeting this level of need will be dominant and those at higher levels are less important (Maslow, 1943:372-382).

By combining Goffman and Maslow's frameworks, I argue that the process of obtaining normality could be understood as a way that a variety of needs are met. By fulfilling 'needs' that are desired, individuals can take control of their social situation where the social world becomes 'normal'. So using these combined concepts, this study will investigate the individual motivations which impact on how Chinese people identify.

#### **2.4.2 Social organisations**

In addition to individual motivations, social organisations also play an important role in shaping diasporic identity (Anthias, 2001). Nation-state and family are the most notable ones.

The role of the nation-state in host societies has been stressed in a number of studies (e.g. Anthias, 2001; Hall, 1993). The notion of 'nation-state' implies that the borders of the state mark the divisions between nationals and non-nationals (Sales, 2012). States also create a structure of hierarchy in that society based on people's unequal participation due to ethnicity, gender and class; and ethnicity sometimes becomes a medium for nation or state formation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). State actions create categories of group consciousness and solidarity, so there is a politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2003) and exclusion. Through the involvement of nation-state, a diaspora's societal condition and identity are shaped for political purposes.

In Britain, state actions are constantly being taken to tighten the borders around the nation, where the rules of governing entry, citizenship and integration become exclusive and selective (Kofman, 2005; Sales, 2012). With the overall trend of restricting routes of entry, the state differentiates between the skilled and unskilled, comparatively putting less restriction on the mobility of the skilled and problematizing the migration of the unskilled (Kofman, 2005). Multicultural policies have been blamed for allowing the loss of 'national values', but Sales (2012) notes that such policies have never been implemented systematically and have only been generally arisen from local initiatives. As argued by Kofman (2005), a sense that migrants and minorities are a threat to the homogeneity of national consensus and culture shapes citizenship and integration policies. For instance, these policies require citizens and long-term residents to 'relate to the liberal core values such as human rights and respect for the law' and 'know the national language(s)' (Kofman, 2005:93). All sorts of state actions and agendas therefore shape the construction of ethnic identities including the Chinese experience in Britain.

The literature tends to downplay the role of 'home' states in shaping diaspora (Sales et al., 2011). But this political context is crucial in relation to the Chinese, as different regimes in China have actively organised the overseas Chinese (Christiansen, 2003). Sales and colleagues (2011) record that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese exiles played an important role in supporting nationalism in China. Following China's independence, they were incorporated into the state through the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. With the foundation of the PRC in 1949 and later on during the Cultural Revolution, the overseas Chinese were associated with opposition as supporters of imperialism. The opening of China to the global market in 1978 brought another reversal, as Chinese abroad were encouraged to contribute to the development of 'the motherland' in various ways. They involve themselves into China's

politics and acquire a vested interest in the state with expectations of making money and forging a relationship with the elite at home (Sales et al., 2011:201-202).

As China turns into a major international power in the world, suggested by Pieke and colleagues (2004:12), 'Chinese globalization' leads to profound consequences for all individuals who engage with anything Chinese. The overseas Chinese are arguably a notable group to whom profound consequences could apply. Ong and Nonini (2004) observe that those who were previously referred to as Southeast Asian, Malaysian, or Indonesian Chinese, or as Taiwanese, are now positioned as 'Chinese not resident in China'. They argue that China is reinstalled as 'primal source and centre, the *Middle Kingdom*, *fons et origo* of "Chinese culture"' (Ong and Nonini, 2004:9). In addition, Pieke and colleagues (2004) also note that Chinese globalization is constrained by structures of a world system which is still dominated by the West. These arguments suggest that the construction of Chinese identity in a western society could involve interplay of political powers.

The Chinese state seeks to identify China as the motherland of the Chinese diaspora, with the idea that if overseas Chinese are not part of the mainland society, they are still an extension of China (Ong and Nonini, 2004). Due to the political involvement, the attachment to China could therefore create boundaries within the Chinese in Britain (Sales et al., 2011). When the idea of home involves attachment to the state, those who claim their connection with China may feel enhanced Chinese status while those who do not may exclude themselves from other Chinese (Sales et al., 2011:214). China's involvement reshapes the construction of Chinese identity and it reaffirms the importance of exploring a political dimension in Chinese diasporic practice.

The idea that no other social organisations can interfere with the authority of the nation-state has however been questioned. The continual existence of undocumented migration (Castles and Miller, 2009) shows the limitation of the nation-state in controlling migration. Appadurai (1996:166, cited in Brickell and Datta, 2011) studies the role of mass media and other modes of cultural globalization in shaping diasporic identities. He suggests the role of 'translocal communities' in creating new 'postnational identities' that are free from the influence of nation state. The state's capacity in deciding diasporic identities therefore requires exploration (Sheffer, 2003).

Apart from the nation-state, the family also plays an important role in constructing a series of belongings. Family is an important social institution where social rights and

obligations are distributed; where social hierarchies are normalized; and where values are transmitted through generations (Collins, 2001). Family is crucial in migration networks, and it provides financial and cultural capital that make migration possible (Castles and Miller, 2009; Ryan et al., 2008). Family bonds strengthen the construction of identity such as mother tongue maintenance (Reynolds, 2010; Tannenbaum and Howie, 2010).

In a traditional Chinese family, age and seniority constitute a social hierarchy. Collins (2001) notes the seniors of a family often have responsibility and natural authority over juniors. After observing Chinese families in Australia, Tannenbaum and Howie (2010: 410-411) claim that parents' control over children is tighter than in typical western families, and children are encouraged to suppress aggression and anger towards senior family members.

Studying the Chinese in Britain, Song (1996) notes a strong sense of family obligations where children are encouraged to help in family-run takeaway business, and this shapes the younger generation's sense of Chinese identity. Parker (1993) observes that the Chinese maintain a certain formality in generational relations. My MA dissertation (Lin, 2007) about overseas Chinese students in London observes their emotional suppression towards seniors. More recent research on Chinese elderly people in London however suggests a different aspect (D'Angelo et al., 2010:37). It observes that changing family structures and pressures of work often make family members unable or unwilling to provide care for elderly members. Older people's expectations of family members become much lower as they do not wish to become a burden on the children. The changing circumstances of society may alter the concept of family and question how it continues to maintain and transmit Chineseness.

### **2.5 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the key concepts that are crucial for understanding Chineseness. The project examines a shared notion of Chineseness through exploring Chinese people's negotiation of group boundary and home. The boundary of ethnic differences, according to Alba (2005) and Zolberg and Long (1999), is negotiated through a dialectical process. The boundary is often 'crossed' or 'blurred' (Zolberg and Long, 1999:29) where other cultural identities are adopted. This research addresses the nature of boundaries and the process of boundary negotiation which is relatively under

studied (Alba, 2005). To analyze individual experiences of these macro level concepts, I learn from Song and Parker's (1995:244) idea of 'positionings', stressing the impact of individual backgrounds in shaping individual identification and visualizing individuals' change of positions during boundary crossing and blurring. The review of literature on individual backgrounds related to Chinese identification in Britain suggests that religion, gender and partnering have not been well explored. This study will discuss key individual backgrounds involved in the negotiation of Chineseness and analyze how the process takes place.

With regard to the notion of home, research suggests that home is multidimensional in relation to diaspora (e.g. Brah, 1996; Blunt and Dowling, 2006) and specifically the Chinese (e.g. Wang and Wong, 2007; Sales et al., 2009). Spaces can be connected where 'transnationalism' (Pieke et al., 2004; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998) and 'translocality' (Brickell and Datta, 2011; Appadurai, 1995, cited in Smith and Eade, 2009) are constructed. The participants in this study were born in different countries, unlike in some existing research (e.g. Pieke et al., 2004; Wang and Wong, 2007) and this potentially complicates the conceptualization of home. This research will analyze where home is at national and local levels and explore the connection and negotiation of homes.

To analyze individual motivations behind the construction of Chinese identity, I will combine Goffman's (1972) concept of normality and Maslow's (1943) idea of needs. I also attempt to take account of the roles of nation-state (Anthias, 2001; Hall, 1993) and family (Collins, 2001) in shaping Chinese identification.

The project captures the negotiation of Chineseness of Chinese people in London who have different backgrounds and experiences, and this informed sampling in the fieldwork. Some scholars address ethnic minorities such as the Chinese as an 'imagined community' who share a group boundary and a homeland (Brubaker, 2005). Some others highlight that they construct multiple attachments to cultures and places (e.g. Brah, 1996; Ong and Nonini, 2004; Wang and Wong, 2007). Based on the diverse sample, this study attempts to respond to these debates.

I note in this chapter that the notion of identity is a social construct, entailing symbolic meanings and material representations (Anthias, 2001; Blunt and Dowling, 2006), and will mean differently to different people. This understanding therefore informed the methodology of the research, especially the use of qualitative approach which

emphasizes meanings, perception, experiences and constructions of social world. The details of methodology, the way how the research has been undertaken to address the construction of Chineseness, will be discussed in the coming chapter.



# **Chapter 3: Researching Chineseness-**

## **Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The last chapter discussed the key concepts related to the study of Chineseness. Focusing on boundary and home, this research aimed at examining whether all Chinese share a notion of what it is to be Chinese. This chapter addresses how the research was carried out to achieve this. It will start with presentation of research design, followed by discussions of research methods including focus group, interviews and ethical issues involved. It will then address the processes of sampling, data collection and data analysis. Reflecting on the co-construction of knowledge by both the participants and me, this chapter will review my role as the researcher and finally the interactions which took place in the fieldwork.

### **3.2 Research design**

This study is a qualitative investigation about the meanings, experiences and feelings about a diverse sample of Chinese people in London. Qualitative research is context-sensitive, fluid, flexible and exploratory (Mason, 2002). The study is a response to identity debates about community and multiple identities, which suggests the need to explore individual negotiation of identity (Song, 2005). Qualitative research is especially appropriate in addressing such a micro level issue, as it studies the phenomenon in its everyday context by starting from the subjective and social meanings related to it by the participants (Flick, 2009). Qualitative research enables this study to explore the complexity, roundedness, nuance and depth of the ordinary experiences of being Chinese in London.

The strength of qualitative research is its exploratory methodology. As discussed before, the literature has not drawn sufficient attention to the nature of boundaries and process of boundary negotiation (Alba, 2005); and the construction of home for the Chinese in Britain is under-studied. Literature on Chineseness often focuses on a specific element of identity and specific Chinese sub-groups, and there is a lack of attention to how the notion of Chineseness is constructed by individuals and particularly how it is constructed

differently by different Chinese people. Hence, the constructions of boundary, home and a shared notion of Chineseness have not been investigated sufficiently in relation to the Chinese in Britain. Qualitative research is a powerful tool for exploring a variety of perspectives on any given phenomenon (Flick, 2009). Using methods which are most suited to qualitative research, this study explores what the key features of Chineseness are, how boundaries and homes are negotiated, and what key factors shape negotiations of identity. By exploring these issues, the key themes of Chineseness are demonstrated and examined to determine whether and how a shared notion of Chineseness is constructed.

Qualitative methodology particularly takes account of the way in which external factors influence perceptions and experiences. For example, arguments about the multi-layered, shifting and dynamic construction of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2003) and boundary negotiations (Zolberg and Long, 1999; Alba, 2005) are developed in relation to a macro level. An exploratory methodology has the capacity to take account of wider social and political factors which influence people identify themselves.

Qualitative research can be underpinned by various theoretical approaches, and these approaches differ in the way they understand their object and in their methodological focus (Flick, 2009). Flick lists three basic positions that various approaches are based on. They include structuralist positions, ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. I follow the tradition of symbolic interactionism, which is concerned with studying subjective meanings and individual sense making (Flick, 2009:57). Coined by Herbert Blumer (1969:2), symbolic interactionism considers how human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that they have for them. Such meanings are derived from social interaction and are modified through an interpretative process. Social reality is in a sense a product of processes by which social actors negotiate the meanings for actions and situations (Blaikie, 2000). It was discussed in Chapter 2 that identity is a social construct which is given meanings. This social construct is negotiated and renegotiated based on differences and commonalities between individuals and others in society- in other words, 'us' and 'them'. The concept of symbolic interactionism lends itself to exploring individuals' negotiation of Chineseness as it focuses on how different Chinese people understand and make sense of themselves and their social relationships in a non-Chinese society.

Symbolic interactionism claims that when a person defines a situation as real, this situation is real in its consequences (Stryker, 1976, cited in Flick, 2009). This recognizes

that people perceive the world differently depending on different backgrounds, previous experiences, and even different contexts. This approach is useful for this study, as it draws on individual accounts of Chinese people who come from very different backgrounds and experiences. It keeps the focus on how being Chinese is socially constructed for each participant and how individuals negotiate their identity in London. Chinese people in London have various places of origin, reasons for migration and different experiences in the UK and other countries, so they will negotiate their Chineseness in different ways. Qualitative methodology informed by symbolic interactionism is well suited to exploring how Chinese people negotiate their identity in relation to the wider UK society, other migrant groups and other Chinese people.

Researchers' conceptual stance on the empirical social worlds leads to a choice of a particular method (Mason and Dale, 2011). Based on the approach of symbolic interactionism, the central starting point for research is the ways in which individuals invest objects and experiences with meaning (Flick, 2009). The reconstruction of such subjective viewpoints becomes the instrument for analyzing social worlds (Blaikie, 1993; Flick, 2009). In this study, I started from the participants and the meanings that being Chinese have for them. I then reconstructed the situational context, the social and cultural meanings from these subjective meanings, and my interactions with other members. I focused on the meanings and sense making of Chineseness, but I also bore in mind a 'socio-architectural' view (Mason and Dale, 2011:5) perceiving ethnic identity as a part of social structure. As I completed this study, I made an effort to link the individual narratives to the social structure, reflecting on the role of ethnic identity in constructing social order.

Qualitative research generally generates narratives which are rich, full and real in addressing a research topic (Robson, 2002). The production and analysis of narratives are central to the investigation of this study. Narratives are interpretive devices through which people represent themselves, and by which people connect together past and present, self and other (Mason, 2004). According to Mason and Dale (2011), narratives and stories are not just good ways of eliciting perspectives on the social world or of narrating experience of it, but are also part of the fabric of both everyday existence and cultures. In this sense, the social world is itself seen as a 'storied' entity, where people 'make' and 'tell' stories rather than just acting a part in them (Mason and Dale, 2011:4-5). Understanding the stories of Chineseness provides an insight into the differing Chinese individuals' social world.

### **3.3 Research methods**

#### **3.3.1 Overview of methods**

Since the negotiation of Chineseness is revealed in individual stories, this study uses interviews and a focus group to collect narratives of Chinese identity. Interviews and focus groups create a social situation similar to everyday interactions and conversations (Mason, 2002) where participants make and tell their stories. Research participants are given much freedom and control in constructing the situation, setting the agenda and generating the themes in the ways that they deem important. These methods maximize their capacity to produce situated knowledge (Mason, 2002), where the meaning and sense-making of Chinese identity can be studied.

The combination of interviews and focus groups helped to explore the research questions from different perspectives and to involve different Chinese sub-groups. A focus group was carried out prior to the individual interviews. It invited established migrants to discuss the development and social relations of the Chinese population in London. It captured the narratives of established migrants who are more difficult to recruit for interviews but more importantly, these migrants witnessed the development of Chinese in London and have a rich and lengthy knowledge of Chineseness in a London context. The experiences of these people provided general knowledge of the topic and enabled me to develop, adjust and refine the data collection tools for interviews. Originally this study intended to explore cohesion and divisions among the London Chinese 'community'. However, as the focus group discussed cohesion and division, issues of boundary and home emerged which then generated some of the topics and questions to be investigated in more depth in the interviews.

On the other hand, the interviews focused on individual construction of Chineseness, collecting experiences from a diverse sample of Chinese people including British Born Chinese, recent migrants and established migrants. Since the investigation of Chineseness concerned everyday accounts of the meaning and negotiation of identity, it required an in-depth discussion to explore an individual's personal story. The data collected demonstrated rich, in-depth and diverse experiences of identification, and it became the main source for data analysis. These individual experiences were then compared to the general knowledge collected from the focus group. So the combined methods investigated the notion of Chineseness from both individual and group

perspectives, from a wide range of Chinese individuals. These methods interacted to provide a better understanding of the research topic. The details of each method will be discussed further later.

The participants of the focus group and interviews were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling was used not to select a representative sample of all possible variations, but to develop a rich and deep understanding of being Chinese by drawing on comparisons among the participants from different backgrounds and experiences. As discussed before, the contemporary Chinese population is very diverse (Lam et al., 2009), so the investigation of whether there is a shared experience of Chineseness required data to be collected from participants from diverse backgrounds. These backgrounds concerned the individual's generation of migration, age, gender, place of origin and other socio-economic status. Drawing on these people's experiences, this study was then able to generate diverse and comprehensive conceptual accounts of the notion of Chineseness.

Through this purposive sampling, the processes of data collection, analysis, theory development and sampling worked interactively (Robson, 2002), and were reviewed at different stages. After each fieldwork event, I updated demographic information, transcribed the data, translated it into English (if Chinese was used) and carried out a brief interim analysis. As each fieldwork event provided different experiences of Chineseness, it informed the next fieldwork and recruitment of participants. When some issues needing clarification surfaced through the initial analysis, I was fortunate to be able to follow up with a revisit to the field to discuss those issues with the participant.

I was aware of language differences in the Chinese population in London. As discussed in Chapter 1, BBCs often use English as their first language; first generation Hong Kong migrants speak Cantonese and read and write traditional Chinese; recent migrants from China speak Mandarin and use simplified written Chinese. As someone who is proficient in these three languages in both spoken and written forms, I was able to use the language skills to capture the in-depth experiences of a diverse sample of Chinese people and facilitate the recruitment, data collection and data analysis.

Thematic analysis guided data collection and analysis of this study. This approach emphasizes the importance of reality through the eyes of participants, examining the meaning and sense-making in context and in its full complexity (Blaikie, 2000; Mason, 2002). It involved interrogating both the participants' narratives and the researcher's

interpretation of them (Smith et al., 2009).

By using this approach in the fieldwork, I was able to explore new areas with which I was not previously familiar but which were extremely valuable in capturing the core themes of Chineseness. Initially, this research focused on the notion of 'community', investigating cohesion and divisions between the Chinese. Based on my knowledge of social network and migration, the original project was developed to address social interaction among a variety of Chinese people. However, during the fieldwork where notions of 'community' and how people made sense of it were explored, the issue of negotiations of boundary and home strongly emerged. A 'dance' of Chinese identity surfaced from the stories of the participants and began to explain the lack of cohesion in the Chinese 'community'. It appeared to question my naive notion of a homogeneous London Chinese community and point to the diversity of identity, differences in belonging and where people called 'home'. So, on-going thematic analysis informed the research focus and guided this study to explore the key themes of Chineseness important to the participants. This change of research focus required me to engage with a whole new area of literature, which was challenging. But it captured the core meanings of being Chinese for individuals which I now realise I had taken for granted.

I maintained field notes (see Appendix 1) throughout the research process. Field notes supplement memory and direct attention in the on-going process of research (Mason and Dale, 2011). I took notes to recall themes of the participant's accounts, dynamics of our interaction, thoughts that I had and any amendments to be made for future interviews, and anything else related to the research. My notes were (mostly) analytical, in terms of both a starting point of data analysis and a reflection of my own positionality. For example, after discussing some preliminary findings with my supervisors at a very early stage of the fieldwork, I wrote down in the notes that the issue of social interaction did not seem to capture a deep meaning of the participants' experiences. Writing notes encouraged me to search for the reason and eventually change the research focus. By writing notes about interviewing Ying Song (who migrated from Hong Kong), I started to be aware of my role as a Chinese person from China and how my positionalities shaped the research.

A key informant discussion was held during the early stage of the fieldwork. The key informant had longstanding work in the community and provided me with an insight into the development of the London Chinese population and the heterogeneity of Chineseness. He also gave me ideas of sampling in terms of what sort of people I could

interview and how and where to find them. The discussion enabled me to review and adjust topic guides for the focus group and interviews, especially in relation to differences between the Chinese.

My own personal experiences, observations and contacts were also useful in the fieldwork. With my BBC friends, I attended 'BBC meets' where British Born Chinese tend to gather. Those personal experiences added my understanding of BBCs' experiences, allowing me to strengthen my insider view for collecting and understanding their narratives. In addition, I took part in services of several Chinese churches after the focus group participants suggested that church was the '*only place*' where different Chinese people could join together. What I observed, however, was that although they attended the same service, Chinese people tended to be grouped into three main categories: established migrants, recent migrants and British Born Chinese. This grouping in the church was noticeable from their obvious way of seating and participation in activities and I was rather surprised to note the divisions even when participating in a religious service. Discovering this division challenged my naive assumption of homogeneity. Those personal observations encouraged me to change research focus and explore issues of identity, boundary and home.

### **3.3.2 Focus group**

A focus group was carried out with some established migrants in a Chinese community organisation. Song (1996) noted in her research on the Chinese that, compared with the younger generation, it was more difficult to access their parents, who are now the established migrants and mostly elderly in the 'community'. A major reason for that difficulty, as Song suggests, was because 'many Chinese people of their generation and social class background had received little or no formal schooling' and therefore a low level of appreciation of higher education and research (Song, 1996:61). The difficulty of recruiting this group was also reflected in this project, where they implicitly or explicitly showed a low interest in participating. Since this group's point of view is important for the research, a focus group was used to collect their narratives as it appeared to suit them more compared to interviews. People who were reluctant to be interviewed on their own could be encouraged to make contributions in a focus group (Robson, 2002). These older people may have a low interest in research, but they are happy to talk with people they know in a community organisation, when the environment is safe and familiar (Silverman, 2004). Hence, a focus group carried out in the local community organisation became a useful strategy in researching this 'hard-to-reach' group.

A focus group provides a 'naturalistic' social situation, which can include a wide range of communicative processes such as storytelling, jokes, arguments, persuasion and challenge (Silverman, 2004:180). It enabled the older people to talk comfortably with each other as they do in the community centre. This method took the investigation of situational knowledge further by stimulating group interactions (Mason, 2002). The dynamics of social interactions encourage people to react and build upon the response of group members, discuss, debate and disagree about key issues, and provoke the development and elaboration of accounts (Silverman, 2004). Rich data can be gathered as people challenge each other, argue and draw out the justification for different perceptions or positions. In addition, the focus group is an efficient way of getting a group of participants together (Tilki, 2003; Silverman, 2004). But more importantly, the group interaction with each other allows the researcher to learn the experiences of Chineseness that are most important to the members.

Community organisations are considered as a place where established migrants seek support (Lam, et al., 2009). The organisation, which was selected for the fieldwork, had been long established and its active members were mainly first generation Hong Kong migrants. At the time of the fieldwork, I was working there as a Welfare Advisor, so it became much easier for me in terms of access to potential participants. I received support from the Centre Manager who was the 'gate-keeper' of the organisation. It was agreed that the Centre could include this event in the report for its funders. I was aware that if I recruited my clients in the Centre, who I seemed to have power over, there would be possible negative consequences, and therefore I avoided recruiting them. Support was received from a colleague and friend who managed Centre activities. The target was to recruit people from a Tai Chi class, which took place outside the Centre premises and whose members saw me as a person they knew of but had no professional relationship with. One week before the focus group, a good variety of people were recruited. They differed from each other in terms of place of origin, migration paths and socio-economic backgrounds. They originally came from Mauritius, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Malaysia.

However, unexpectedly, half of those people who promised to attend did not turn up on the day of the focus group. I suspect in retrospect that when my colleague asked those people to participate, they agreed only to save 'face' (a Chinese norm) when in fact, they had no interest in participating. Two elderly people, who refused us at the time of recruitment, were honest enough to say that research would not bring any benefits to



their life. In addition, although those migrants from different countries practiced Tai Chi together, they might feel uncomfortable communicating or expressing themselves because of their differing personal backgrounds. The problems of recruitment revealed the boundary between the different groups and echoed the Chinese lack of community interaction suggested by D'Angelo and colleagues (2010). This also encouraged me to explore the heterogeneity of the Chinese 'community' in London.

Facing these unexpected circumstances, I had to be practical and carried out additional recruitment in the Centre. Fortunately, three members in the Centre offered to help me. Two of them were regular visitors of the Mahjong club and luncheon club. The other one was a client, who came for advice around once every two months. Thus, eight people were recruited for the focus group.

The participants of the focus group were aged between 50s and 70s; 3 females and 5 males; and there was a couple among them. On average, they migrated to Britain around 32 years ago, mostly from Hong Kong and most of them only spoke Cantonese. Half of them did not have any formal education, two had secondary school, and the other two had skills and vocational training (the highest level among all).

### **3.3.3 Interviews**

The in-depth interviews were carried out with Chinese individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Because the focus group targeted established migrants who were mostly over 60 years old, the interviews deliberately tried to recruit Chinese people below that age group. Aspinall and his colleagues (2008) suggest that the in-depth interview is crucial for allowing the full complexity, depth and nuanced nature of personhood to emerge. In this study, such benefits of interviewing became very evident.

Before each interview, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire which requested information including what languages they spoke. Rachael from Belgium ticked English and some Chinese languages, but it was only through the interview that she expressed Flemish was indeed her '*other mother tongue*'. Ching from Malaysia identified 'student' as his occupation, but it was only through the interview that he disclosed he worked full-time while holding a student visa. British Born Chinese Hou commented in the interview that: '*even though in the questionnaire I tick I can speak English, Cantonese, Mandarin and Hakka; apart from Hakka, I am not fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin*'. According to Hou, the interview really allowed him to fully

express his multilingual capacity and his complex and conflicting sense of belonging and not belonging. Because the study was concerned with in-depth, contextual and potentially complex accounts of identification, the interview method was deemed the most appropriate approach to data collection. Interviewing a diverse sample of Chinese people provided rich and illuminating data to address the exploratory nature of the research.

Sampling for the interviews was time consuming. This was because I tried to ensure that each participant would bring different perspectives to the research. I constantly reviewed the diversity of the sample's experiences and backgrounds, which then informed the next recruitment. My personal networks, both Chinese and non-Chinese, helped me a lot in the recruitment especially in the early stages. These networks included my friends, contacts from Chinese community organisations, my supervisors, and colleagues from my current workplace. Snowball sampling then brought me more interviewees, who added different experiences to the previous participants. For example, a participant mentioned to me during the interview that one of his Chinese friends had a different experience in terms of partnering. This friend was in a relationship with a non-Chinese girl and because of that, he faced tensions with his family. After the interview, I asked the interviewee if he could help me to get in touch with this friend. He agreed and that is how another rich story (from Lee Sung) was brought into the research.

The participants of each Chinese sub-group (established migrants, recent migrants and British Born Chinese) were recruited through different channels. For instance, Sarah and Sally were both recent migrants from China who happened to be both Christian. They were, however, recruited through different channels and were believed to bring different accounts to the research. The various sources of recruitment enabled this study to obtain the diversity of the sample.

Fourteen people participated in the interviews. They were aged below 60; 8 females and 6 males. Their education ranged from secondary school to a postgraduate doctorate degree, and most of them had an undergraduate degree. The participants ranged from those who claimed to be very Chinese, living and working only with Chinese people; to those who hardly had any contacts with a Chinese person, having very little knowledge of Chinese culture. The majority were somewhere in the middle.

#### **3.3.4 Ethics**

Mason (2002) argues that all qualitative research raises ethical issues as they engage participants deeply with their affective, private and public experiences. Murphy and Dingwall (2001:339, cited in Flick, 2009) speak of 'ethical theory'. They suggest that researchers should avoid harming participants and that participants' values and decisions should be respected. Research on human subjects should also produce some positive benefit for the group being studied or for society as a whole rather than be carried out for its own sake. I was aware of ethical issues involved in this study and addressed these through following the British Sociological Association and Middlesex University guidance on ethics. This meant obtaining informed consent from participants, respecting their decision about what I should call them in the paper, protecting confidentiality and anonymity. I was also conscious about treating the fieldwork as a learning opportunity for me, but also making the research as beneficial as possible for the participants.

Prior to the fieldwork, I attained ethical approval from Middlesex University Social Sciences Academic Group Ethics Subcommittee. The Statement of Ethical Practice of the British Sociological Association guided me throughout the conduct of the research.

Before each fieldwork event, I obtained informed consent from the participant. As Ethik-Kodex (1993:I B2, cited in Flick, 2009) suggests, it is essential that participation in research is voluntary and takes place on the basis of the fullest possible information about the goals and methods of the research. I provided such information for each participant through presenting leaflets and introducing the project personally. I informed each participant that this research was for my doctoral study and a report would be produced. I assured the participants that confidentiality would be protected and that any information given to me would only be seen by me or my research supervisors. Oral consent, rather than a written one, was received from the participants at the start of each interview. The use of oral consent was due to the consideration that there was strong trust between most participants and me, and many Chinese people were sensitive and nervous about signing documents.

At the beginning of each fieldwork event, I asked the participants to give themselves a pseudonym. I considered this important in terms of encouraging them to 'make' their story starting with naming the subject in the story. It also protected confidentiality and enabled individuals to express themselves with less concern. For instance, after giving himself a pseudonym and receiving my confirmation of confidentiality, Ching (pseudonym) disclosed his homosexual orientation in the interview. He also expressed

his passions for '*simple life*' and he could somehow relate to that through his pseudonym ('Ching' means 'clean and pure' in Chinese). In some cases, the participants did not mind me using their real name in the paper, but were happy as well to accept a pseudonym. Some people believe that their name represents part of their characteristics. BBC Lap Smith (pseudonym), for instance, took his real Chinese name as a reminder to search his 'roots' because it means remembering the ancestors. Although I was unable to retain the meaning of their name, I gave them pseudonyms following the same style of their real name. By name style, I mean whether their real name uses an English first name or a Chinese first name; an English surname or a Chinese surname; and a Vietnamese, Mandarin or Cantonese spelling. These styles reveal a feature of previous generations and a sense of origin. For example, they suggest whether the father is English or Chinese, and whether their family came from Vietnam, China or Hong Kong. I made such an effort to maintain these individual characteristics.

During the recording of our conversation, when the participants were about to disclose their names, I made them aware that it was preferred not to. However, it appeared to be more difficult for focus group members not to disclose their names. The naturalistic social situation (Silverman, 2004) gave them an impression that they were having a chat with people they knew, just like what they did in everyday life. Calling people by surname is very typical for this Chinese generation, so asking them not to follow the usual way seemed to create some constraints in the interaction. Fortunately, Chinese people are in fact not very recognizable from their surname. They easily could share the same surname, just like what focus group members Mr Fat Tse (pseudonym) and Mr Peng Choi (pseudonym) did. Furthermore, these people were happy for me to use their real name, except for Mr Chon (pseudonym) who named himself and we all called him by this name. So based on these considerations, each participant was referred to by their surname in the discussion, and they were given a pseudonym afterwards which was used throughout the rest of research process.

When an interview took place in an open or shared area, such as café and a workplace, I made the extra effort to protect confidentiality. I remained aware of the surroundings to ensure against eavesdropping; temporarily stopped the interview when others came within hearing range; and moved to more secluded areas when necessary. I was actually more concerned than the participants with regard to maintaining confidentiality.

The fieldwork generated a lot of materials and I stored them in compliance with the Data Protection Act, storing them in a locked drawer or on a password protected file on my

personal computer. The demographic information, data recordings, transcripts, translations and notes were only accessed by me and were available to my supervisors as required.

I considered the fieldwork as an opportunity for me to learn from the participants, rather than just taking knowledge about them. Some participants told me in the interviews that I had a good understanding of what they said and what they meant. As Rachael said, '*you are so good in analyzing me*'. My understanding eased the pressure when the participants found it difficult to explain themselves. But I was aware that, misunderstanding and overlooking important information could take place due to the fact that I am also Chinese and because of that, a common understanding of an implicit point might be assumed without rationally exploring it. So when the participant made an implicit point, I would request further clarification by pretending to not know anything about that point or asking for clarification for research purposes. By doing that, it brought out the participant's real voice; I learnt things that I was not aware of; and the participant was empowered to tell me more about Chineseness. In the interview with Sally, for instance, Sally mentioned '*all people with Chinese bloodline are Chinese*'. As we both came from China, she assumed I understood the concept of bloodline and there was no need for further explanations. I tried to encourage her to explore the issue of bloodline, so I raised a question. She was surprised and asked me 'you don't understand'? I replied that for the sake of the recording I needed her to explain more, which encouraged her to tell me about what bloodline means and why it is important.

During our conversation, I encouraged the participants to talk freely, as it normally led to a further discussion and a deeper understanding. I avoided being judgemental and welcomed all sorts of ideas and attitudes. Before the interview with Ying, she expressed her concerns that her answers might not be '*welcomed*'. I explained to her that the research was nothing about good and bad, but about her perceptions and situations; and she was relieved with that assurance. Another interviewee, BBC Sophie, started our conversation by showing a strong sense of self-confidence and superiority about being British born while labelling me as a Mainland Chinese student. Her perceived hierarchy did not make me feel comfortable, but I considered it as a learning experience. Regardless, our interaction during the fieldwork generated a rich insight into the positionings which will be discussed further in a later section.

The participants were affected by the research through their involvement (Robson, 2002). This firstly surfaced from the needs of support they explored in the research. I

was prepared to offer signposting information, such as a list of Chinese organisations and BBC meets; but it turned out to be not vital to them. Emotional support and help with welfare benefits became the biggest resources that I could offer. For example, I provided emotional support by telephone to recent migrant Sarah when her grandfather passed away and she could not attend the funeral. She appreciated my support very much and told me in a text that *'you must be the angel that god sends to me'*. I was pleased that I could support her in some ways, but I was also aware that we were part of a research relationship and I was not religious like her. Based on those considerations, I did not offer to meet up as some of her friends might do. Some participants, especially focus group members, tended to favour welfare benefit advice from me in return for their participation. When it only meant reading a benefit letter and helping them to understand it, it was easily provided on site. When they required more support, I then requested them to visit as an advice client in the community centre rather than a research participant. Furthermore, some British Born Chinese showed their lack of confidence in Chinese identity. For these people, it provided good support when I shared with them some similar (anonymous) experiences of other BBCs.

Participants were sometimes keen on telling their stories sometimes thinking about identity for the first time, and they found the interviews helpful for their own self-realization. For instance, Peter who I planned to interview as a key informant preferred to tell his own story, because *'others did not want to hear'*. Another example is interviewee Ying. When I carried out the focus group in the community centre, Ying happened to be there and noticed the event. After I completed the focus group, Ying came to me and said that I should not just talk to the elderly, but also to her who might have different experiences. Furthermore, during interview, Lilly realized that her feeling about living in Britain was the same as what her parents felt about living in Vietnam before coming here. She found it *'really interesting actually'*, because she had never thought about that, and as she said, it was good for her to realize it. Finally with Lap, he became quite depressed after disclosing the confusions of his identity. It made me question whether it would be better if we had not talked about those confusions. I therefore addressed his depression and discussed with him further at the end of the interview. We both believed that the confusions showed the rich experiences that he encountered; it was a good learning process, and as he said, *'thank you, I learn a lot of myself'*.

### **3.4 Data collection**

This chapter will now address the data collection of the research. It will review the sampling of this study including a description of the participants. This will be followed by a discussion of data collection process.

#### **3.4.1 Sampling**

The sampling frame of this research is people residing in Greater London who fully or partly claim to be Chinese. Greater London has the largest and most diverse Chinese population in Britain (Lam et al., 2009). As a cosmopolitan city where more than half of the population are ethnic minorities (ONS, 2011), London provides ordinary spaces for people to construct diverse attachments (Hatziprokopiou, 2009). The Chinese in London hence provide a valuable case for the examination of Chinese identity and issues around community and cosmopolitanism.

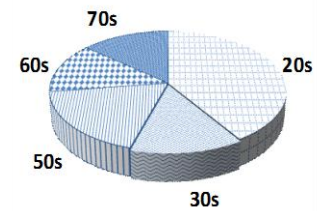
Sampling processes in the focus group and interviews have been discussed earlier. Since the recruitment was mainly carried out through personal networks, a strong sense of trust had been built up between the participants and me prior to the fieldwork event. So before the actual fieldwork, I often provided information of the study in a casual way, although information leaflets (in English, traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese) were also prepared and used in a few occasions. I usually introduced the project in the participant's first language, which even narrowed our social distance and strengthened the trust between us. The participants were formally informed of the aims and objectives of the research. Occasionally when they asked for some more information, such as about the fieldwork already undertaken, I always provided information on the project but avoided breaking the anonymity of the participants, making any comments or leading their views in any way.

In total, twenty-two Chinese people participated in this study. They included established migrants, recent migrants and British Born Chinese. I acknowledge the diverse experiences of people within each category, but this was a way of dividing the Chinese identified by many participants. Considering the government recognizes 10 years as long residence, I used 10 years to define recent and established migrants. By established migrants, I mean people who have been in this country for over ten years; by recent migrants, I refer to those who migrated within the last decade; and by British Born Chinese (BBC), I refer to people who were born in Britain and have a Chinese

ethnic background. Among the 22 participants, 12 are established migrants (including focus group members); 5 are recent migrants, and 5 are BBCs.

There were equal numbers of males and females. They were aged between 20s and 70s. In each ten years of age group, there were fairly equal numbers (see Figure 1). I had no success in recruiting any participants in their 40s, but there were participants who were in their late 30s or early 50s. I could not identify people in their 40s within my social contacts and places

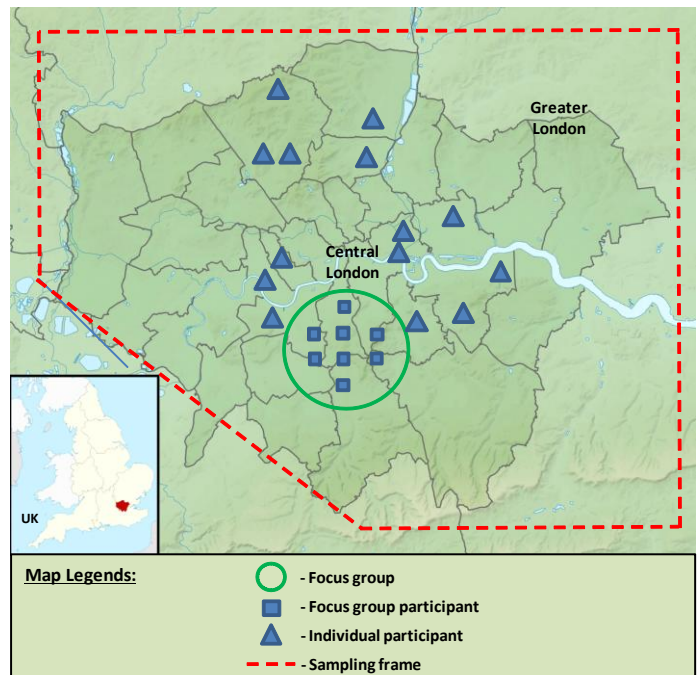
**Figure 1: Age of participants**



that I visited during the fieldwork.

The number of informants in their 20s was the biggest, because they included not only British Born Chinese but also students from overseas. In terms of their education level, they ranged from none to a postgraduate doctorate degree, and a large proportion of them were undergraduates. With regard to housing status, similar numbers lived in social housing, owned their property and rented privately. Figure 2 gives a brief idea of where they lived in London.

**Figure 2: Participants' location**

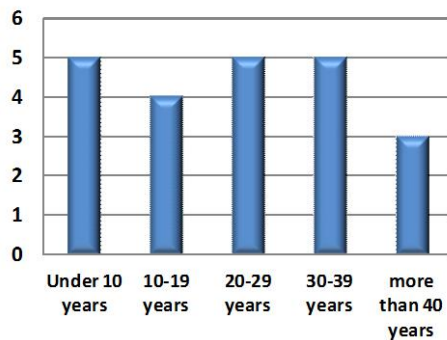
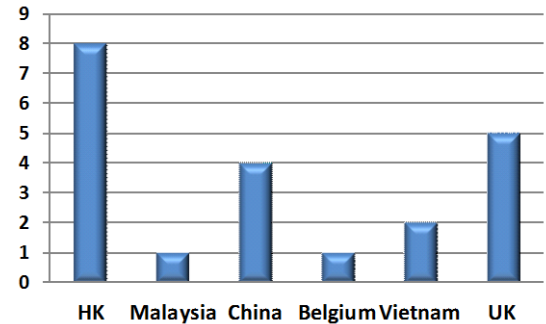


Map from: Wikimedia Commons (undated). Greater London UK relief location map. Available from: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greater\\_London\\_UK\\_relief\\_location\\_map.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greater_London_UK_relief_location_map.jpg) (accessed 4 April 2013)

The participants vary in terms of diasporic backgrounds, such as generation of migration, place of birth, duration of living in the UK and family migration path. Five of them were born here (BBCs) and the remaining seventeen were migrants. The migrants came to the UK at different age (from 1 to 60s) and their migration was driven by various purposes (study, asylum and refugee, family reunion, and employment).

With regard to how long the participants had been living in the UK, there were people who came to this country 2 years ago, some had been in this country for over 40 years, and BBCs were between their 20s and 30s who had lived their whole life in Britain. Figure 3 shows a fairly even balance in numbers of participants in regards to how long they had been living in the UK.

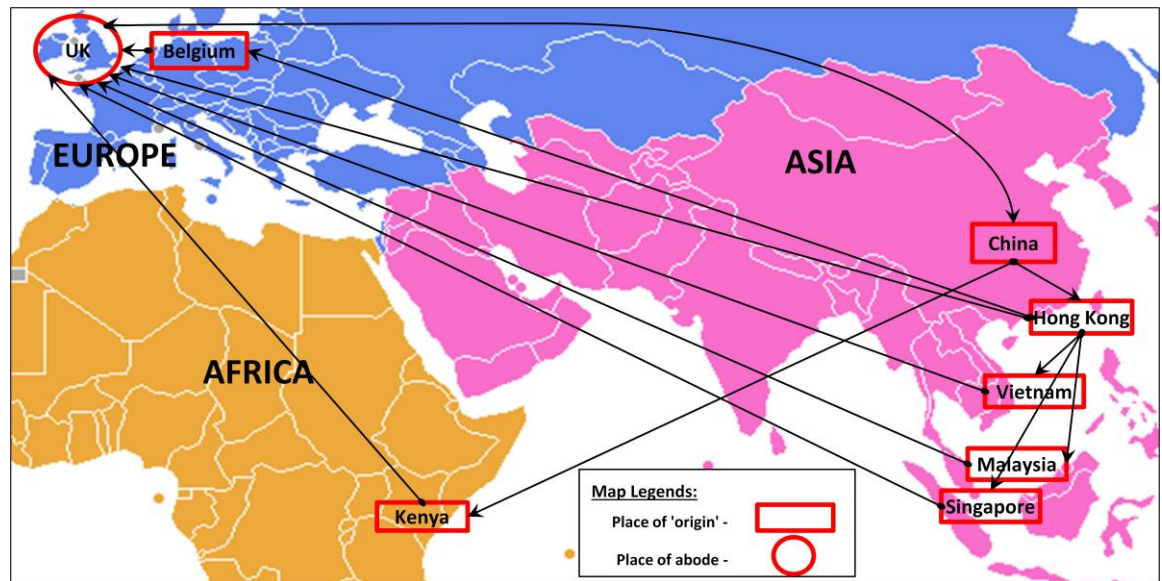


**Figure 3: Number of participants  
- duration in the UK****Figure 4: Number of participants  
- place of birth**

In terms of their place of birth (see Figure 4), the largest number of people were born in Hong Kong (8 people), six of whom were from the focus group. In the contemporary Chinese community in London, only the recent migrant population consist of a large number of people born in Mainland China. So along with other recent migrant participants from other places, four people born in China were recruited.

The migration path of the participants' family was complex. Most of them did not migrate straight from China to Britain. Their family tended to move from China to another place, and from those places, they then came to Britain. Nevertheless, the migration path did not always follow the same direction (from China to other places), because some people also went back to China. For instance, two young participants, who were born outside China, had visited there alone and lived there for a year. Figure 5 presents the dispersed places that the participants and their immediate family members had settled across Africa, Europe and Asia, as well as their routes of migration.

Figure 5: Migration routes of participants and families



Map from: Wikimedia Commons (undated). *World Map FIFA2*. Available from: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:World\\_Map\\_FIFA2.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:World_Map_FIFA2.png) (accessed 26 May 2012)

Therefore, the sample comes from diverse backgrounds. Although this study does not purport to address the full complexity of the Chinese population, it addresses the experience of identification beyond one Chinese sub-group and thus adds complexity to our understanding of Chineseness. It produced rich data, and obtained different and contradictory views from people of different gender, age, class, generation and migration background. It involved collecting narratives in three languages and raised issues concerning doing research using more than one language. The diverse background of the sample also enabled me to explore dynamic identifications between the researcher and the participants, which went beyond the categorisation of insider and outsider. Regular reviews and discussions between my supervisors and me suggested that the sample of twenty-two participants had demonstrated complexity, roundedness, nuance and depth of the experience of Chinese identifications.

Sample bias is likely to occur in a way that, firstly, the participants in the focus group were mainly from Hong Kong, but this is a reflection of the fact that most established migrants in Britain are from Hong Kong. Secondly, the sample did not include people in their 40s, although there were some in their late 30s and early 50s. What should be acknowledged is that the interview discussed not only current situation but also individual life history. So the experience of people in their forties has not been excluded from the enquiry.

### **3.4.2 Fourteen stories**

This research relies strongly on the everyday accounts of the individual interviewees. So the fourteen stories of the people took part in the interviews provide us with some understandings of where this research started. The interviewees have been given pseudonyms and demographic information on the interviewees is listed in Appendix 2.

Pat Man, BBC man, 20s, a British Born Chinese man in his late 20s. After graduating from university, he worked in a Chinese community centre; and now he works in the government sector.

Sarah Chen, a student in her 20s who came from China 4.5 years ago. She is a group leader and interpreter in a Chinese church in Central London, which strengthens her relations with established and recent migrants. Through her work in a coffee shop, Sarah works with non-Chinese people.

Sally Yang, a student in her 20s who came from China 7 years ago to study accounting. She has worked in different places in the Chinese 'community', including Chinese community organisations, Chinese weekend schools, and more recently a Chinese restaurant. She is also a member of a Chinese church.

Ching Tse, a man in his 30s who came from Malaysia 6 years ago. He is a gay man and a Buddhist. Two years ago, after being here for four years, he went to China and studied Chinese literature for a year. He used to work in mainstream catering and now works full-time in Chinese catering.

Peter Cheung is in his 50s. He is a refugee from Vietnam who came here around 30 years ago. He has been working in the Chinese community sector. He has no relatives in Vietnam now, and maintains a strong link with brothers in China. Peter has a doctorate degree and his study was about China.

Cali Lam is in her 20s and she came from Hong Kong 2 years ago along with her husband. She worked in a Chinese community organisation while studying for a master's degree. One year after the interview, she finished her study and went back to Hong Kong to continue her career as an English teacher.

Amanda Xiao is in her 30s. She came from China in her teenage years and has been in this country for 16 years. Amanda is a Christian. She works as a professional outside the 'community' and married to a man from Mediterranean Muslim origin.

Rachael Wong is a Belgian born Chinese woman in her 20s. She came to London four and a half years ago after she graduated from university and worked short term in Belgium. She has been working in London as a temporary worker in banking.

Ying Song is a single woman in her 50s. She came from Hong Kong 16 years ago. She has secondary school education. She has always been working in the Chinese sector, first in a Chinese clothing factory and now in a Chinese community centre. She rents a room living with some other Chinese people.

Lap Smith, a British born man of mixed-descent; one of his grandfathers is white British. His parents were both born in Africa. He is in his 20s and is studying a university degree.

Hou Chan is a British Born Chinese man in his 20s. He spent a gap year working as an English teacher in China. His parents came from Hong Kong and presently run a Chinese restaurant in Surrey. He worked as a fundraiser in a charity in London. One year after the interview, he headed to Africa for voluntary work on international development.

Sophie Chow is a British Born Chinese woman in her 20s. Her parents were from Malaysia and Singapore. Sophie has a postgraduate degree. She works in investment banking and has recently bought a flat by herself.

Lee Sung is a British Born Chinese man in his 20s. His parents came from Hong Kong. He has been living in a privately rented accommodation with his girlfriend. His girlfriend is white British and they have been together for five and a half years now.

Lilly Hoang is a woman in her 30s. She came from Vietnam at the age of one with her family (parents and siblings) to seek asylum in Britain. She has a doctorate degree and works as a professional in a Chinese organisation.

### **3.4.3 Collecting data**

We will now discuss how data were collected from the focus group and interview

participants. The focus group was carried out in a Chinese community organisation, and it lasted for 1.5 hours. For each interview, the venue and time were decided according to the preference of the participant's choice and convenience. It often took place in the participant's workplace, a café, a restaurant or my accommodation, during daytime or after work. I ensured a comfortable environment for the interviewees to help them to be at ease and express themselves freely. Each of these interviews took about 1 to 2 hours.

A demographic questionnaire and two sets of discussion guide (Appendix 3 and 4) were designed for the focus group and interviews, and these materials were translated into Chinese. Among the Chinese population in London, those from China read and write simplified Chinese, while those from other parts mostly use traditional written Chinese. Since the participants might only read one of these styles, translated versions in both simplified and traditional written Chinese were prepared, and I used the relevant version depending on which language the participant chose to use. The demographic questionnaire collected basic information about the participants, such as gender, age, language spoken and housing. Such demographic data supported the purposive sampling and analysis. The interview guides were designed to be semi-structured, which covered major issues but allowed each interview to focus on participant's specifics such as their experiences and events and situations relevant to them. It enabled the researcher to explore knowledge in the participants' everyday accounts, in a systematic but flexible way. The questions in the interview guides started with some general enquiries such as what their idea of Chineseness was, and left the personal issues such as where their home is for a later stage of discussion. All those allowed the trust and rapport to build up and encouraged the participants to speak more comfortably.

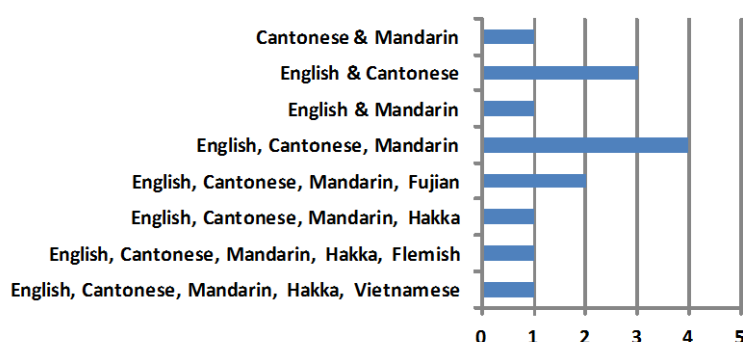
A key strength of this research was that I was able to offer the participants a few choices of language. It is noted by Mason (2002) that a research heavily depends on people's capacities to verbalize and interact, as their experiences and understanding are constructed and reconstructed in the face-to-face interaction during the research. So it was crucial that the participants communicate with the researcher in a language that they felt comfortable with. Observing their research experiences with the Chinese, Song and Parker (1995) argue that by speaking in their second language, participants may limit their expression and miss some fluid representations amongst languages. Learning from Song and Parker's experiences, I invited the participants to choose a language from English, Mandarin and Cantonese, which are the major spoken languages for the Chinese in London and which I was comfortable to engage in. Speaking a language they were comfortable with and fluent with created a social situation which was more close to

their everyday life. It then helped to encourage them to ‘make’ and ‘tell’ their stories, and such benefits were proved by the richness of the data.

Sometimes, following the participant’s choice of language meant that other languages could not be used at all. For instance, at the beginning of interview, Ying who does not speak English raised her concern that during her previous communication with me, she did not understand me whenever I added some English words in the sentence. I was indeed not conscious that I did that and therefore, during that interview, I paid extra attention to ensure no English was spoken.

**Figure 6: Number of interviewees - language capacity**

In the focus group, Cantonese was used because most members only spoke Cantonese. In the interviews, all the participants were more or less bilingual or multilingual



(see Figure 6). They generally used their first language in the interview. And when they were fluent in more than one language, they selected the usual one from their everyday interaction, or the one that they used with me in our personal relationship. Among the individual interviews, six were carried out in Cantonese, six in English and two in Mandarin.

Both focus group and interviews were voice-recorded with the participants consent. I tended to chat some more with the participants after the fieldwork. Sometimes, the interviewee made some more interesting and relevant comments after I completed the interview and turned off the recorder. I always asked permission to switch the recorder back on again and requested the person to repeat what he or she had just said. The interviewees were always happy to do so when I stressed how interesting their comments were.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

An initial interim analysis of the recording and field notes was carried out after each fieldwork episode, followed by a substantial analysis of all the data at the end. Having the great benefits of working in three different languages, a challenging feature of this

approach occurred in the processes of transcribing, translating and interpreting. A crucial task for data analysis was therefore to ensure, while working with different languages, I could achieve a real reflection of the participants' meanings and sense-making, a reflective reconstruction of the narratives, and a cooperative generation of knowledge in spite of the difference in language.

### **3.5.1 Transcribing and translating**

To prepare the data for analysis, transcribing and translating were carried out. This process was rather time-consuming, due to the variety of languages used. I transcribed all the Chinese and English recording by myself and truly embedded myself in the data. As a Chinese native who is fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin, I then translated all the Chinese transcripts, more than half of the total, into English. I have improved my English language skills during the process of translation. Two friends who are proficient in Cantonese, Mandarin and English kindly reviewed some anonymised random parts of various translations. Also to ensure the quality of translation, I sometimes did back-translation and compared it to the original when using translated quotations in this thesis.

I tried to understand the meanings that participants expressed; which helped me to translate words which might not necessarily make sense through direct translation. For instance, Sarah tried to make a point that, while 'others' freely express their emotion 'with love', the Chinese are required to suppress those emotion in order to protect the authority of seniors. To explain it further, Sarah used an example that Chinese parents talk to their children in a negative way. She quoted in Cantonese, '生個叉燒都好過生你'. By direct translation, this sentence is 'it is better to give birth to BBQ pork than to give birth to you'. It means 'it is worthless for having you as a child'. Understanding this sentence through its implicit meaning makes perfect sense. There are some other slang terms which were used in both Cantonese and Mandarin to express a particular meaning. 'Gwei Lo' in Cantonese and 'Gui Lao' in Mandarin ('Ghost', meaning foreign devil) were commonly used to refer to the non-Chinese. 'Ah Cha' (sounds similar to 'Ah Cha' in Hindi) refers to South Asians particularly Indians. And 'Tong Zhi' in Mandarin and 'tung zi' in Cantonese ('同志', 'comrade' by direct translation) specifically mean 'gay'. Understanding meanings of slang was crucial for the interpretation of the narratives, and as a Chinese speaker I was able to achieve that.

I was aware that, different words in Mandarin and Cantonese can express the same meaning. For instance, '棒' ('bang') (Peng Choi) in Mandarin and '犀利' ('sai lei') (Sarah

*Chen*) in Cantonese both mean 'excellent'. Although some common terms are used in both dialects to represent the non-Chinese, Mandarin speakers sometimes called them '洋人' ('*yang ren*', meaning outlander), while Cantonese speakers more often used '西人' ('*sai jan*', meaning westerner). It was the first time that I engaged closely with the use of different dialects, and I was amazed by how these Chinese dialects expressed the same phenomenon differently. I made notes about what language and dialect was used in each interview, and analyzed Chinese transcripts according to the dialect used.

In Chinese language, the same word '英国' ('*ying guo*' in Mandarin; '*ying gwok*' in Cantonese) is used to describe 'English' and 'British'. Hence, the distinction between Englishness and Britishness became less clear in interviews in Chinese. In the interviews carried out in English, the participants explicitly claim a common perception that in many cases Englishness refers to a cultural identity while Britishness refers to citizenship (to be discussed in the next chapter). So I translated according to the aspect of identity that each sentence referred to. I translated it to 'Englishness' when the participants meant a cultural identity; otherwise 'Britishness'. In relation to the term 'Chinese people', an individual could use different Chinese words to represent it throughout their discussions. The distinction between 'the Chinese in Britain' and 'the overseas Chinese' (Parker, 2000:76-77) seemed to be blurry in the individuals' ordinary experiences.

It was mentioned before that each fieldwork event was arranged depending on the availability of participant. So between two visits to the field, there was often not enough time for a full process of transcription, translation and initial analysis. However, I always made time to listen to the recording and add to the field notes I kept if anything unusual struck me or if there was something that needed further exploration. Transcription and translation were then undertaken whenever time permitted, as fieldwork went along. Notes were always maintained after fieldwork. An initial analysis was carried out briefly, finding out key themes so as to inform the next data collection.

### **3.5.2 Interpreting data**

After transcribing and translating data, a detailed analysis was undertaken. The data analysis was carried out mainly based on the transcribed and translated data in English. I also listened to the voice recording and read over original Chinese transcripts many times. Hearing the recordings and reading the transcripts repeatedly meant I often heard or saw different things, picked out inconsistencies and led to me back to the literature, or



highlighted issues to explore with my supervisors. These enabled me to obtain a higher degree of 'rich, full and real' understanding (Robson, 2002:455) of the narratives.

Analyzing the participants' narratives provided me with a great learning opportunity. I had studied social policy and social work before this PhD; and my research interest was around migration and social networks. So when I started this research, I had limited knowledge of ethnic identity. During the initial analysis as fieldwork proceeded, the issue of Chinese identity surfaced, so I had to make an effort to develop my knowledge on that subject. As the analysis went on, I constantly went back to theory, gaining more academic knowledge and relating it to the participants' everyday experiences. It was challenging to engage with the whole new literature, but it was rewarding and it developed my academic potential.

Learning from the Chinese participants' experiences, I compared my notion of Chineseness to theirs. I learnt many notions of Chineseness which I was not aware of. For instance, I was not aware that the order between drinking soup and having main meal is used to define Chinese culture until it was mentioned by some informants.

More importantly, I learnt to review and reflect on the notion of identity through the process of data analysis. As a Chinese person, certain aspects of Chinese and other cultures were taken-for-granted by me. I had treated it as known facts that Chinese people have 'yellow skin', they have strong family bonds, and legal ownership is crucial for the Chinese in turning the building they live in to a 'home'. In comparison with Chinese culture, I considered it common for white English to leave the parents' house at the age of early twenty, and I identified fish and chips as a typical British food. It was only when I discussed with my supervisors that I learnt to confront my own assumptions of 'Englishness' and Chineseness.

My supervisors are not Chinese but are white scholars of English and Irish origin. They challenged my notions and that of my participants of the Chinese having 'yellow skin'. As a native English woman, my supervisor Rosemary told me that not all English people eat fish and chips and leave their parents' house at the age of twenty-one. My supervisors Louise and Mary are Irish migrants. They shared with me some common perceptions and experiences of being migrants in London; and it reminded me that some experiences portrayed by the participants and me as 'Chinese' may be actually shared with other migrant groups, and I need to consider not just ethnicity but also other backgrounds such as class and gender. Therefore, my supervisors helped me to

understand that the assumed uniqueness of specific social and cultural norms is socially constructed. I needed to avoid generalizations of both Chinese and non-Chinese; and look at diversity of Chineseness, considering not just individuals' place of origin but also other aspects. Revisiting the participants' social constructs as an outsider enabled me to obtain a fuller understanding of Chinese identity. My supervisors, who guided my academic and personal development, were personally involved in this study which added enriching dimensions to the generation of knowledge.

Furthermore, the analysis also reflected my development in my own 'dance'. I reviewed myself and my experiences as the analysis went along. The analysis helped me to think further and deeper, about who I am and how I construct this idea of myself. I am more aware of my positionings with my Chinese and non-Chinese friends and colleagues where we share many similarities but also have some differences which could separate us. I have been learning to see people from more diverse points of view, understanding their 'dance' and the reasons behind it. These in return enrich my understanding of the participants' stories.

The analysis was guided by thematic analysis. It was a process of shifting back and forth, between the participants' claim on Chineseness and my interpretation of it. The focus group and interviews were analyzed using the same method in order to maintain the consistency. Data analysis software NVivo was used to assist in the process of coding and developing a coding tree. NVivo provides a set of tools that enable users to organize complex qualitative data, explore and examine relationships in the data, and produce reports and display results (Bringer et al., 2006). Although it is powerful software, the variety of languages involved in this study limited its use. I did not want to solely rely on the translated version of the transcripts because the Chinese narratives were the original source that reflected the participants' social world. Using NVivo to analyze the data in both English and Chinese would cause more complications than the benefits. So due to these considerations the software was only used to a limited extent. The generation of codes and themes decides the structure of finding chapters, which is presented in Figure 7.

The cyclic process of thematic analysis started with analyzing individual cases. I first read notes with regard to the case, and familiarized myself with key points and thoughts that occurred to me at the time of the fieldwork. I worked closely and intensively with the text, going back to the original Chinese transcripts when needed. Through making sense of the participants' meaning embedded in their language, I generated several codes

such as 'appearance', 'religion' and 'national homes' (refer to Figure 7). Data related to different codes were highlighted in different colours in the transcripts.

In each individual analysis, I looked for patterns in the codes where themes are generated. For instance, a commonality exists among codes 'appearance', 'bloodline' and 'ancestral link', where they are considered as a 'racial' aspect of Chineseness shared between the Chinese. 'Race' therefore became a theme. Based on a hierarchy among codes and themes, a coding tree was developed, identifying a 'central phenomenon' (Robson, 2002:194) of Chineseness. The rich contexts in each theme started to reveal the multi-layered, shifting and dynamic construction of Chinese identity.

After individual case analysis, the case was compared with the rest of data. Additional themes that emerged were referred back the original cases. Having an idea and understanding of the codes and themes emerged from the data, I then used NVivo, because it can organize the codes and themes in a systematic and efficient way (Bringer et al., 2006). I carried out open coding in NVivo labelling the codes. This process appeared to repeat the original coding process, but it allowed me to revisit the data and prepare for a further analysis in NVivo. I grouped similar codes to a theme. Using tree nodes function, I generated the coding tree. It showed a hierarchy of codes and themes as well as their connections, which could not be systematically obtained without the software. I constantly adjusted the connection and structure as the analysis went along. So using NVivo helped me to adjust these and view the up-to-date structure in an easy and efficient way.

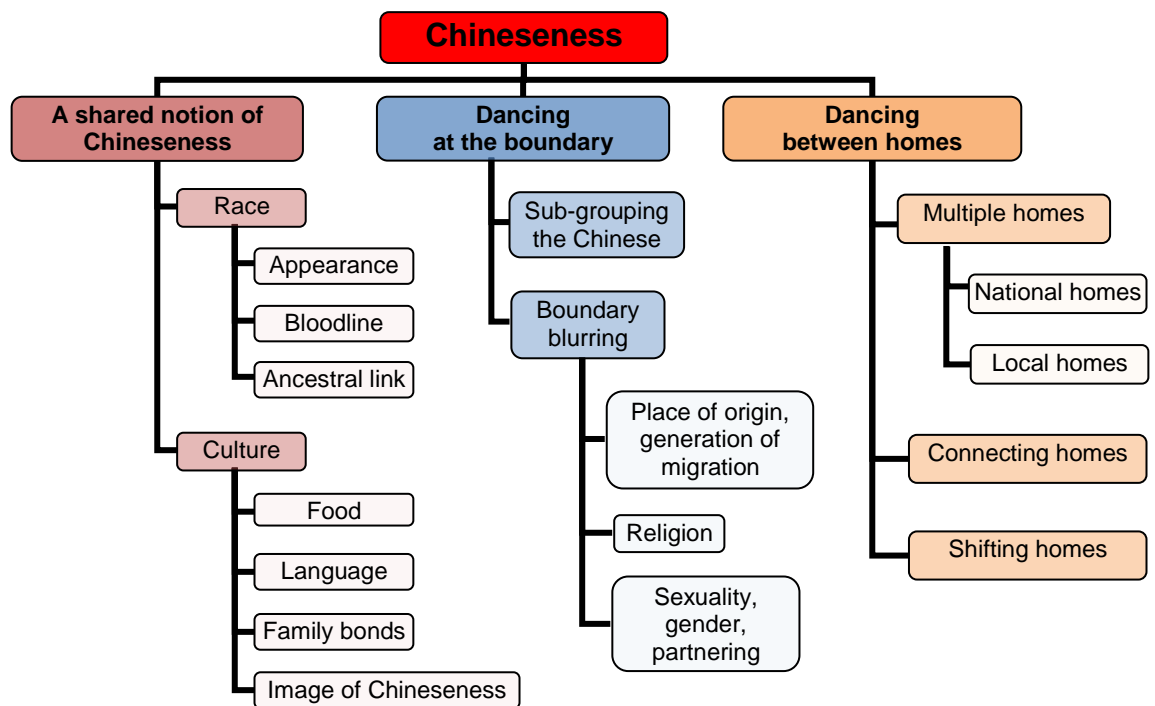
Searching for patterns in the themes, I grouped the themes under superordinate themes such as 'a shared notion of Chineseness', 'dancing at the boundary' and 'dancing between homes'. So the codes and themes cautiously moved to more general statements (Smith and Osborn, 2004). Through the process of analysis, the everyday accounts of Chineseness were conceptualized.

To summarize the grouping of superordinate themes, themes and codes:

- 'a shared notion of Chineseness' , 'dancing at the boundary' and 'dancing between homes' are superordinate themes;
- 'race' and 'culture' are themes under superordinate theme - 'a shared notion of Chineseness';
- 'sub-grouping the Chinese' and 'boundary blurring' are themes under superordinate theme – 'dancing at the boundary';

- 'multiple homes', 'connecting homes' and 'shifting homes' are themes under superordinate theme – 'dancing between homes';
- 'appearance', 'bloodline' and 'ancestral link' are codes under the theme of 'race';
- 'food', 'language', 'family bonds' and 'image of Chineseness' are codes under the theme of 'culture';
- 'place of origin and generation of migration', 'religion' and 'sexuality, gender and partnering' are codes under the theme of 'boundary blurring';
- 'national homes' and 'local homes' are codes under the theme of 'multiple homes'.

Figure 7: Structure of finding chapters (Chapters 4-6)



A tree structure of findings (Figure 7) was then created to capture what matter for the participants' Chineseness and how they negotiate over the meanings of it. This structure reflects the general statements that: boundary and home are used to define the notion of Chineseness; and while the participants tend to portray a fixed notion of Chineseness, this notion is indeed negotiated in a dynamic performance. It contests, reflects and extends the existing studies discussed in the literature review.

The finding chapters will be presented based on this structure. Chapter 4 addresses a shared notion of Chineseness, where various 'racial' and cultural features are socially constructed to create the idea that Chinese people share a group boundary and a home. Chapter 5 illustrates the 'dance' at the boundary, where heterogeneity of the Chinese

surfaces and individuals negotiate their positions in a blurry boundary. Chapter 6 demonstrates 'dancing' between homes, where multiple homes are constructed, connected and shifted. Please refer to Figure 7 while reading the next three chapters.

### **3.6 The researcher**

While the research collected participants' experiences of meaning-making, it also involved my sense-making as a researcher. As Flick (2009:14) notes, the essential features of qualitative research are 'the researchers' reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production'. Other scholars have also argued that participant's experiences can only be seen through researchers' experientially-informed lens (Smith et al., 2009); and what a researcher writes and speaks is in context, stemming from their particular history, culture and personal experience (Hall, 1993). This research comes from my journey of constructing identity and contributes to my continuous learning of myself, and this section will reflect on this.

A first name starting with an 'X', tells the majority people in Britain that I am somehow 'different'. The spelling of my name tells Chinese people that I am not just Chinese but Mainland Chinese. I am in my 30s, female and used to study and practise social work. All these factors cast a light on how I interpret the participants' sense-making in the research and the social situation around me generally. They also influenced how I was interpreted by the participants.

I came to London to study a master's degree which then led to my motivation to continue with this PhD. During my study, for three years, I worked part-time in a Chinese community centre in South London. There, I got to know established migrants; celebrated their version of Chinese culture with them; and became a part of them. When I was in Teochew, Canton, I mostly spoke my local dialect in order to maintain my local identity, but after coming to London, I had to improve my Cantonese in order to communicate with established migrants in the community centre. During those years, I had more Dim Sum- a typical Cantonese food- than I had while living in Canton. I was close to two Chinese families - families with established migrants from Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia, and British Born Chinese- where I gained more insights of their everyday lives.

In those years, as I was actively engaging with the 'community', I could feel how

established migrants try to hold on tightly to their familiar rules; how British Born Chinese are confused about what to follow when encountering various customs and obligations; how recent migrants become insecure when they face a new environment and the established Chinese 'community'. I began to see how the situation becomes complex when everyone tries to secure their small territory even when sometimes it is not necessary. Such learning encouraged me to start this research to revisit the notion of Chineseness.

Four years have gone by since I 'distanced myself' from my Chinese world. As I live here longer, I realize I need to 'cross' the boundary where I can learn about other cultures and 'communities'. Working in a non-Chinese environment allows me to review the notion of Chinese identity, compare it with other ethnic identities, and learn about Chineseness from a bigger picture.

I am still Chinese in many people's eyes, but sometimes I have become an outsider of the 'community'. Having a meal in Chinatown with a friend who is white, I was not offered any 'daily soup' ('lay tong' in Cantonese) which was free in that restaurant. I later discovered that they only offered it to, in the manager's words, 'people who speak Chinese'. Feeling bad about being left out as I do speak Chinese, I realized I had to face the fact that I might be an outsider to some extent, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes imposed. Three years ago when I visited my city in China, I confused a local person at the bus stop by speaking perfect local dialect yet not knowing which bus to take. My story continues, as I entered a mixed-race marriage.

Prior to this study, I was involved in research projects on Chinese population in London (Lam et al., 2009) and London Chinatown (Sales et al., 2009). My MA dissertation (Lin, 2007) investigated experience of Chinese overseas students in London. These research experiences related to the Chinese formed a platform of background knowledge supporting the investigation of this study. In addition, I was well equipped with skills and attitudes to be in the field, thanks to my education in social work and social research. I truly believed in Stryker's (1976, cited in Flick, 2009) statement that when an individual defines a situation as real, the situation is real in its consequences. I was eager to learn about the participants' experience from their angle. And I was trained on how to listen in a professional manner, and how to encourage a speaker to explore their views and experiences. Such academic background enabled me to collect rich data and dig beneath the individuals' negotiation of Chineseness with the participants.

My personal and academic experiences influenced the design, methods, data collection and analysis of this research. My understanding of Chinese and non-Chinese people motivated me to learn about identity, helped me to understand the participants' narratives, and made sense of and developed my experiences and perceptions. I was able to gain access to a wide range of Chinese individuals through various channels, and being multilingual was also a strong point that benefited the research. Academically, I was prepared with knowledge and skills and was able to take up challenges particularly in terms of learning and engaging with a whole new area of literature.

In this project, I was not only an insider but also an outsider. I shared commonality with participants in some ways while differing from them in other ways. For instance, we shared a certain level of commonality in language, as I was often able to speak their first language. However, we differed in terms of aspects like place of origin. Hence, my insider status helped me to gain access and understand the participants' experiences; and I tried to use my outsider position to reconstruct the narratives and view them in a bigger picture. Through these, I tried to interpret the participants' narratives better as a researcher. Again due to our commonalities and differences, our interaction during the research was multi-layered, shifting and dynamic, generating a 'dance' of identification which will be discussed now.

### **3.7 Our 'dance' in the fieldwork**

This section will review the face-to-face interaction in the actual 'doing' of the research. It has been noted by research that participants' narratives are built through connections they make with others (Mason, 2004), including the researcher. So research is co-constructed by both participants and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009; Mason, 2002). Examining the interaction in their interviewing experiences, Song and Parker (1995:243-244) argue that, regardless of whether a research is about identity or not, 'the unfolding of the researcher's and the interviewee's cultural identities is central to the ways in which the researcher and researched position themselves in relation to the "other"'. Exploration of identification in research relationships is therefore important as it becomes part of the generation of contextual knowledge. Since this study investigates identity specifically, the identification in the fieldwork becomes essential in a way that it became data in its own right and forms part of the meaning and sense making of our social world.

Goffman (1959:22) portrays face-to-face interaction as a 'performance', where actor and audience define and negotiate the definition of the situation. In a sense, our identification can be viewed as such a 'performance'; and since our performance is so dynamic, I use the term 'dance' to highlight its dynamism. 'Dance' suggests a shifting movement of moving back and forth, moving together or against each other. In the focus group, the group interaction among participants was significant; while in individual interviews, identifications between interviewees and me were highlighted. So these two aspects of our 'dance' of Chineseness will be focused in this section.

### **3.7.1 'Dance' in the focus group**

Among all people involved in the focus group, I had the highest level of education. I worked as an advisor in the community centre. And as a recent migrant from China, I was perceived by the participants as '*updated*' rather than '*old-fashioned*' like them. My individual background hence enabled me to achieve respect and trust from the participants. In the focus group discussion, I was able to confidently pose questions and ensure the discussion flow. In order to encourage everyone's participation, I started by saying that every member's opinion was important to me. I made efforts to encourage weaker voices, such as my client who was not talkative by nature. When they spoke, I asked others to be quiet and listen to them. By making them the focus, they gradually got more involved in the discussion.

People who participated in the focus group were established migrants who were considered to be most knowledgeable about Chinese 'community' in London. These people aged between 50s and 70s were much older than me in my late 20s, and being senior culturally made them respectful. In a sense, the participants had certain power and authority over me, and this enabled them to develop their themes with less hesitation. What were stressed in the focus group were hence the interactions among participants. As Mason (2002) also argues, a feature of focus group is its stimulation of group interactions.

In the focus group, the participants cooperated together as a team and depended upon this cooperation to maintain a particular definition of the situation. This definition of the situation appeared to be an image of established migrants who were most traditional and 'Chinese'. So for instance, when they discussed the 'western' characters of BBCs, a strong feeling of frustration and worries demonstrated a strong sense of cohesion among the group members. These people performed a 'dance' in relation to other



Chinese and me in the fieldwork, and 'moved' as a team towards the same direction.

Goffman (1959:22) suggests that individuals in a group can be allowed to 'direct' the performance in different 'ways and degrees'. In the 'group dance', the participants played different roles which were influenced by their individual backgrounds. Among the participants, three males - Fat Tse, Peng Choi and Man Lam- spent longer in Britain compared with others. Being the most experienced in the community enabled them to be most influential on the construction of Chineseness in the group. They always led the 'dance' and their statements were always given most attention by fellow participants. They did not hesitate to raise an opposite opinion or a further discussion. They had more confidence in exposing themselves, including using their personal examples. Fat, for instance, expressed his feeling of not knowing where he belonged, which led to an intensive discussion of where home is.

Yao Chen came to join his family 12 years ago when he was in his early 60s. Among those established migrants, he had migrated at a much older age and was comparatively new to this country. When a participant raised a concern that some BBCs refused to speak Chinese and accept their Chinese identity, the 70-year-old Yao, along with others, could not wait to criticize those BBCs. He said: *'they think they could just change to be British because they were born in the UK and they have a British passport'*? Yao's reaction was the strongest, and it seems to suggest this established migrant who came in at an older age was very keen on maintaining a shared notion of Chineseness.

Pan Chon from Malaysia was a former financial officer. He had skills and vocational training, which was the highest level of education in the group. Mr Chon spoke the most languages (Cantonese, Mandarin and English) among them all. Compared with the others who were mostly monolingual in Cantonese, this person who identified his first language to be English showed his confidence. Whenever possible, he liked to make comments that made him appear as knowledgeable and unique in the 'group dance'. When the group argued that people from Fujian did not feel a belonging to the 'community', Pan commented: *'Can I state a fact ... that this is because of discrimination between Chinese people'*. The point he made might be a bit sharp, so many others did not seem to know how to respond and how to position themselves in relation to Pan. Peng Choi (a leader discussed above) then stepped in and explained that there was a gap between people from Fujian and Hong Kong, and that was due to different social backgrounds and the dialects they use. Through Peng's lead, the group 'danced' in the same direction again.

The female participants were not as active as males in the group, although they occasionally initiated discussions in relation to vulnerable groups such as the elderly and women. Lum Choi, for example, often followed people's views, especially comments from her husband who was also in the group. It was discussed in the literature review that women have a lower status in Chinese culture. This might to some extent explain why women took less opportunity in 'directing' the group performance.

Different individual backgrounds, such as diasporic backgrounds, education and gender, hence had an impact on how people identified and the ways and degrees where they were allowed and encouraged to construct the contextual knowledge of Chineseness. Based on these backgrounds, some members led and directed the 'performance', some tried to make themselves unique in the group and some 'danced' at the back, although moving towards the same direction.

### **3.7.2 'Dance' in the interviews**

In their influential research on Chinese young people in Britain (Song and Parker, 1995:254), Korean-American researcher Miri Song and a researcher of Chinese and British descent David Parker argue that, based on commonality and difference between the researcher and participant, multiple positionings shift during the interview process. This study strongly echoes this argument, although our identification experiences sometimes differed from what took place in Song and Parker's research. This is because the people involved in this study had a different set of individual backgrounds; we seemed to belong to 'other kinds of research relationships' that require 'further examination' as Song and Parker (1995:254) put it. Our backgrounds were 'simple' in a sense that we were all 'Chinese', but these backgrounds were far complex because there were BBCs, recent migrants and established migrants among us, and we were diverse in terms of generation of migration, place of origin and other socio-economic features.

In Song and Parker's (1995) research, the participants often create an assumption about the researcher, and based on the assumption they withhold or disclose certain information. When I interviewed the participants, I did not initiate claims of commonality or difference because I focused my attention on seeing the social world from the angle of the participants. So as suggested in Song and Parker's (1995:247) experiences, I was positioned by interviewees and 'found myself having to decide if and how I would

respond to these positionings’.

However, I was often perceived by the participants to have strong ‘qualifications for performing’ (Goffman, 1961:106) a Chinese role, because I was born in China and speak Chinese. I sometimes occupied what Song and Parker (1995:251) refer to as ‘moral high ground’ of a strong sense of Chinese identity. Thus, I received requests from the participants to respond to their perceptions, and I experienced strongly how our ‘performance’ was co-conducted by both sides. An example can be seen from my interviews with some BBCs, who had less confidence in their Chineseness compared with me. When I was considered by interviewees to have power and privilege, I was cautious about the vulnerability of interviewees and the effects of such positioning on their construction of accounts. When I interviewed Lap, a man of mixed-descent, he told me his Cantonese name, asking me if I had heard of it and if his Cantonese made any sense. I could see it was important for him that I understood his Cantonese. I made an effort to understand it, and it buttressed his strength in Chinese identity and confidence in performing the ‘dance’.

Song and Parker (1995) argue that physical appearance, personal relationships and language are the identity markers that define the commonality or difference between the researchers and their Chinese interviewees. These identity markers are also common in my interaction with the participants. It was through the shifting positionings based on such commonality and difference that the contextual knowledge of Chineseness was created.

Physical appearance always pulled us together unsurprisingly. So we always ‘danced’ together in the Chinese group based on this ‘racial’ feature. With regards to personal relationships, the participants in this study did not have a strong view as the BBCs in Song and Parker’s (1995:249) research who assume having relationships with non-Chinese indicate a taboo ‘defection’. In our conversations, the participants, especially younger generations, did not mind telling me that they had lots of non-Chinese friends, or the fact that they did not really have a Chinese friend. And they assumed I understood that was ‘normal’ for them. It may be due to the fact that I was introduced to them by their friend or associate who was either BBC or non-Chinese. They then perceived me as someone who understood them (since I had BBC friends), or as someone like them (a Chinese having non-Chinese friends). I was an insider who they shared commonality with. In most of our research relationships, commonality was established between me and the participants who were recruited through my personal networks and snow-balling.

This commonality was based on having a mutual friend. BBC Lee, for instance, excluded himself from Chinese contacts because he thought the Chinese '*keep themselves to themselves*'. He was however very comfortable to talk to me just because I was introduced by his only Chinese friend. In the 'dance', we moved together, 'out of' the Chinese circle who '*keep themselves to themselves*'. Having the same person we could both related to built a strong sense of commonality and trust in our research relationships.

Involving three different languages in the fieldwork, our language fluency and accent signified our identification. Firstly, as someone whose first language is Mandarin, I always found a commonality and shared identity with Mandarin speakers. So in a sense, we 'danced' in our Chinese group. Secondly, I used Cantonese while interviewing Cantonese speakers who were mostly people from Hong Kong. During those interviews, my accent sometimes distinguished me from them. For example, Cali from Hong Kong firstly suggested that Chinese people shared a similar language, putting me in her Chinese 'group' when comparing with the non-Chinese. Cali can speak some Mandarin, so we were the same in a way that we speak both dialects. But later on, while talking about differences between the Chinese, she moved against me by saying '*for example, you are not a Cantonese speaker by birth, are you?*'. Although I was able to communicate in fluent Cantonese, my accent excluded me from Cali's Chinese group in this situational account of Chinese identity. Thirdly, for BBCs and people born in Europe, they perceived me as a Chinese person different from them because I spoke much better Chinese than they did. Sometimes they felt insecure and less confident in their Chineseness when encountering me. For instance, instead of saying 'speaking only little Cantonese', I made a mistake by saying to Lap that he 'did not speak Cantonese'. Instantly, he started explaining to me: '*I do, I do speak Cantonese*', but '*it's embarrassing when I am Chinese and ... I may not be able to converse with you in Cantonese*'. Our capacity in speaking Cantonese made us move against each other. Given the research topic was about Chineseness, being able to position ourselves at the Chinese boundary and claim Chinese identity was important for the participants to ensure the confidence in constructing their narratives. So for Lap, safeguarding the little capacity in Chinese language became crucial. Finally, even though a main language was used in an interview, sometimes the participants used other languages to express certain words and sentences. This happened to most participants, including Ying who asked me not to speak English at all while she used English in three occasions. I was able to understand and respond, so we moved together back and forth across the boundary. This suggests our shifting positionings between Chineseness and the mainstream identity, based on

our bilingual or multilingual capacity.

In addition to physical appearance, personal relationships and language (Song and Parker, 1995), my commonality and difference with the interviewees were also defined by our ideas of home. The participants and I constructed multiple scales of home, and based on these multiple scales, our positions shifted. My interaction with Ying is an example to showcase this.

Ying came from Hong Kong and she has been living in London for 16 years. At the early stage of the interview, she suggested that being Chinese meant having a connection with China where I was born and raised. A commonality was established between us on the basis of this 'home'. Later on, when Ying described that China did great in Beijing Olympics; I asked her without hesitation '*do you feel proud*', and I expected the answer to be 'yes'. However, Ying's answer was '*I don't feel proud, what to be proud of*'? I was immediately shocked by that answer, as someone who grew up in China. Questions naturally came out from my mouth to satisfy my personal interest and desire, '*Do you not feel proud? Do you feel this has nothing to do with you*'? It was at that moment that I noticed our difference in our idea of 'home' related to citizenship. Ying is not a Chinese citizen but I am, and this difference moved us against each other. Through that encounter, I became aware of and started to reflect on my attachment to China which could influence my reconstruction and interpretation of the research.

Our identification during the interviews was negotiated around the markers of physical appearance, personal relationships, language and the idea of home. Our shifting positioning at these boundaries was shaped by individual backgrounds, notably place of origin and gender. Considering the interviewees came from very different diasporic backgrounds, my relationship with them was much more diverse and ambiguous compared with the situation where respondents came from a same sub-group. Depending on the topic of discussion, our backgrounds informed how we positioned and identified each other.

Our place of origin mostly shaped the identifications. This is in line with the narratives of the participants which also highlights the role of place of origin in shaping Chinese identification (to be discussed in a later chapter). While I discussed with BBCs about being Chinese, some raised the concern that they might not be 'Chinese' enough as they perceived me (from China) as a 'real' Chinese person. The perception put me 'in' the Chinese 'side' and the BBCs at the border line of the boundary; and they were only

relieved when they found out I was not judgemental. In another situation when we discussed financial success of the Chinese, these BBCs also moved against me. But at that stage, they tended to show their confidence and power over me, because they perceived me as a new migrant who was not as successful as BBCs in obtaining job opportunities in the mainstream. Therefore, our place of origin led to our different positions that made me more 'Chinese' and the BBCs less 'Chinese'. Due to the issues concerned, the same positioning led to different patterns of power relations.

Sometimes gender affected our 'dance', especially in relation to personal issues. As a female, I shared with the female participants especially of similar age the expectation of maintaining a feminine role. Being Chinese women in the western society made us move together in the same direction, retaining the gender expectation but constantly reviewing and reflecting on it. This shared identity also encouraged those interviewees to disclose their family and personal life. Again due to the gender expectation, I was sometimes uncomfortable with male participants in discussing personal relationships, where barriers in cross-gender interviews occurred (Song and Parker, 1995). For instance, as I interviewed BBC Hou in a café near my workplace, the café was about to close in the evening so we had to move to a room in my workplace. There, we continued with our discussion regarding how his parents prefer him to have a Chinese wife. Being a single woman at that time, I somehow felt uncomfortable when I sat with Hou in a room of a very quiet building and discussed that topic. I found myself 'moving' against Hou, out of the Chinese 'group' we were referring to. I continued with the discussion and encouraged him to explain more; but I raised fewer questions and used short acknowledgements like 'I see' or 'really'. If I were a male researcher, more information could be possibly collected. There were however some occasions where such barriers in cross-gender interviews were not significant. This took place when interviewees were recruited from my personal networks. Ching, a friend of mine, was open to talk about his gay status and sex life. Peter, a previous colleague, confided to me that he failed to date a white girl. They did not relate to me man-to-woman, but as a personal relationship that entailed a strong sense of trust where sensitive personal information could be shared. This reflects the benefit of me being a Chinese person able to recruit participants from my personal networks.

This section has so far demonstrated our 'dance' in the interviews, which was signified by certain boundary markers and shaped by individual backgrounds. Based on these factors, we built up perceptions of each other, shifted our position with respect to the boundary, and disclosed and constructed certain aspects of our social world during the

fieldwork. Through the intersections and overlaps of various backgrounds and identity markers, our identifications and interactions were multi-layered, shifting and dynamic. Such dynamism can be further illustrated by my 'dance' with Sophie, which will be presented now to conclude this section.

Sophie is a BBC whose father worked as a professional in the 'community'. Hearing bad things about recent migrants from China, Sophie had a bad impression of these people. Being contacted by me who appeared to be a Chinese student from China, she placed me in her group of bad impression. I therefore did not receive a very warm welcome at the early stage of interview.

In the interview, Sophie started by saying that she was '*English*' apart from her Chinese appearance. She emphasized it was difficult to maintain Chinese culture for her, because she lived here and worked in a '*quite multi-cultural*' environment which was '*a good thing*'. Sophie could not get away from her Chinese identity because of her appearance. But our same positions at the Chinese 'side' of the boundary were quickly changed because our place of origin set us apart. Sophie moved far against me and the immigrant 'group' that she put me in. This allowed her to avoid 'embarrassments' (Goffman, 1959:51) that might occur while mentioning this group.

It was only when Sophie expressed her wish to learn Mandarin that our distance began to narrow. Knowing some friends in the same situation and understanding their frustration, I showed my respect to this very '*English*' girl. I asked why she wanted to learn Mandarin, implying that she did not have to. As she did not feel challenged, she explained to me that '*I'm quite ashamed*' not being able to '*even put together a sentence*'. In the boundary of language, Sophie had crossed the boundary and became the English. As our conversation was about Chinese identity, Sophie's position led to her lower confidence in front of me. Like what Song and Parker (1995:248) experienced in their research, my position of neither completely outsider nor insider made me the person that was 'safe' to speak to. Sophie therefore started to slowly move towards me with caution. Instead of highlighting her work environment as good and multi-cultural (as previously discussed), she told me '*the environment that I am in ... is very pressurized ... and I say things that I wouldn't normally say*'.

We continued to discuss differences between Chinese people in London. She used the term '*we*' and '*you*' to distinguish two groups of Chinese. '*We*' meant BBCs like her who she portrayed as '*successful*', whereas '*you*' meant new migrants like me who had 'a

*different perspective on life*'. In order to understand her polite and reserved description of people 'like me', I asked what she meant by that; and what she did was giving a similar answer, that they are different from her from *'the way they see things'*. Goffman (1959) notes that the harmony of social relations is crucial in a performance, so people tend to maintain it. For Sophie, letting out her real opinion on 'my' group could presumably damage the harmony of our relations. So she stopped using 'you' and referred to the group as 'them', trying to place me out of that group.

I fully understood why she withheld her full feelings. But in fact, I was also sometimes not comfortable with new migrants especially those who came here for political or economic reasons. Sometimes I would rather exclude myself from the recent migrants group. I define myself as Chinese but not very 'Chinese', and I have also crossed the boundary. So to some extent, I shared some experiences and perceptions with Sophie. I said to her, *'I am really open to any opinion even negative idea'*. She answered me *'oh really, okay'* and asked again, *'what, to be honest?'* Following my repeated requests for 'any opinion', she finally expressed her objection about recent migrants coming here to get money from government and doing illegal work. To again avoid any damage to the interaction, Sophie finished her comment by saying, *'there's no disrespect to them, no offence or anything like that'*. I did not really feel any disrespect. So after 'circling' (Song and Parker, 1995:248) around making sure of my position, she 'danced' closer to me.

At the end of the interview, Sophie told me that I was not as what she had expected; she was surprised at my English fluency; and she showed a great interest in my experience of coming here. As for me, I was also surprised knowing about the traditional Chinese customs she still maintained in the family. Hence, we ended up chatting and learnt a lot from each other.

This was one of our 'dances' in the interviews. Physical appearance, language and customs were notably used by the participant and me to define our commonalities and differences which decided our positionings of identity. Our place of origin and other individual backgrounds have an impact on how we positioned each other in relation to the above aspects of identity. During our 'dance', we negotiated 'a definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1959:22). As Cassell (2005) argues, the active interaction of constructing identity during interview decreases the ambiguity of interview situation. Through the 'dance' of moving back and forth, moving together or against each other, the participants and I co-constructed the contextual knowledge of Chineseness.



### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology of this study. It illustrated the methods used, people involved, and the generation of knowledge in and after the field. It demonstrated the suitability of qualitative research in addressing the research questions. In light of the focus of individual negotiation of identity (Song, 2005) and insufficient literature on issues involved in this study, qualitative research is useful for exploring the rich and in-depth accounts of experiences (Mason, 2002; Flick, 2009). Guided by the tradition of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), this study draws attention to the meaning of being Chinese for the participants; the interpretative process of making sense of their experiences through their interactions with non-Chinese, other Chinese people, and me a researcher in the field; as well as the interactions between my supervisors and me in interpreting the construction of Chineseness.

In order to collect the narratives of being Chinese, interviews and a focus group were used. These methods provided a social situation as in everyday interaction (Mason, 2002), allowing the participants to make and tell their stories of identification. The focus group mostly provided general knowledge of the Chinese in London. Individual interviews which collected in-depth experiences became the main source from which arguments of this study developed.

There were some strengths of this study which were discussed in this chapter. My research experiences on the Chinese provided me with knowledge to develop the study. I was equipped with interviewing skills to encourage the participants to explore their views and experiences. It was challenging to engage with a new area of literature on identity, but it improved my ability and confidence in developing myself academically.

I was able to speak Cantonese, Mandarin and English, so it made it possible for the participants to express themselves in a language that they felt more comfortable with. I was then able to translate and transcribe all the data. These tasks were time consuming and it required extra efforts to work with three languages and to incorporate these languages into English. But it offered a great learning opportunity where I improved my English and had more understanding and awareness of how the knowledge of Chineseness was created through these languages. Being a Chinese person, I gained access to a wide range of Chinese people. This was another strength as I was able to recruit a diverse sample which offered a variety of experiences.

The diversity of the participants leads to another highlight of this study, the dynamic interactions in our research relationships. Our shifting 'positionings' (Song and Parker, 1995:244) of moving back and forth, moving together and against each other, demonstrated the 'dance' of Chineseness in the fieldwork. It now leads to the question of the participants' 'dance' of Chineseness in a wider society which will be demonstrated in the next three chapters.

# Chapter 4: A Shared Notion of Chineseness

## 4.1 Introduction

This qualitative research has collected the experiences of Chinese identity from a diverse sample of Chinese people in London. Chapters four to six will present the findings, exploring and examining a shared notion of Chineseness.

In each interview, we often started with a discussion of what being Chinese means. At the beginning of our conversation, some participants struggled to express it, maybe because certain rules of Chineseness had been taken for granted. It may be also because the essence of Chineseness is a whole experience of being Chinese in Britain, and hence it is difficult to pinpoint each element. Gradually unpacking the notion of Chinese identity, the participants often constructed an image of Chinese 'community' defined by its apparent homogeneity and its clear difference from the majority British 'community'. They perceived a common notion that all Chinese share a boundary and a home. However, as this shared notion was interpreted and performed in the participants' stories, a sense of being Chinese was negotiated in a complex form. A blurry boundary with overlapping identities and multiple scales of home emerged, which deconstructed the shared notion of Chineseness. Chapters four, five and six will illustrate these contradictory but interdependent constructions of Chineseness. This chapter will focus on the shared notion of Chineseness, followed by the analyses of complex negotiations of boundary and home in Chapters five and six.

## 4.2 Homogeneous Chineseness: an overview

*Chinese people have bloodline of the yellow race. (Fat Tse- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*Chinese festivals, ancestor worship and respect for parents- these are Chinese culture. (Sally Yang- student, came from China 7 years ago)*

*Being Chinese is about ... food, language and appearance. (Hou Chan- British Born Chinese)*

Regardless of whether they were born in Britain or abroad, whether they have stayed here for a long period of time or they migrated recently, the participants all appeared to perceive a shared notion of Chineseness. They considered that, like all Chinese, they

are clearly different from other groups because of 'racial' features such as bloodline and 'yellow skin' and cultural identity such as food and language.

Based on these differences, the participants in this study constructed a notion of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006:6), drawing a clear and fixed line between Chinese and others. This perception was echoed by Lee, Rachael, Helen and Peng:

*When you walk along the street, you don't normally see Chinese people with White people but you see Chinese people with other Chinese people. (Lee Sung-BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*Western and Chinese are very opposite of each other. (Rachael Wong- came from Belgium 4.5 years ago)*

*We came from another place to settle in someone else's country. (Helen Chan- came from Hong Kong 15 years ago; Peng Choi - came from Hong Kong 30 years ago)*

In his quote here, Lee argued that the Chinese would only socialize with their own kind and he gave an impression that the Chinese do not 'mix'. Although Rachael and Lee were born and bred in a western society, they stressed that Chinese and western identities are in opposition. They appeared to believe that Chinese people always maintain a fixed boundary of differences regardless of where they dwell. This apparently clear distinction between identities implies a perception that the boundary of Chineseness is 'bright'. A 'bright' boundary, according to Alba (2005:22), involves an unambiguous distinction where 'individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on'. In addition to this constructed bright boundary, focus group members Helen and Peng both echoed a view that the Chinese share an orientation to a home elsewhere, in China. Because of this home, these two migrants considered themselves as outsiders in society even though they had been living in London for decades. Based on the belief that the Chinese share a bright boundary and a connection to China, the participants argued that they are clearly different from 'others'.

This clear and fixed notion of Chineseness will be deconstructed as the participants' interpretation of identity is explored. But at a superficial level, this shared notion of identity provides a sense of essence, which satisfies what Goffman (1972:49) calls a sense of 'normality' and meets various psychological and social 'needs' (Maslow, 1943:373). The idea that they belong to a cohesive 'community' makes sense of the participants' difference in the host society. It provides a secure and predictable social situation where a feeling of safety is maintained. Such identity fulfils a sense of belonging which are important once physiological and safety needs are met. And the

participants' recurrent feelings of pride in claiming Chineseness also suggest a satisfaction of esteem for individuals.

The shared notion of Chineseness is sustained by its difference from the identity of 'the other'. As represented in the earlier quotes, the notion of 'the other' involves multiple layers, such as 'westernness' and 'whiteness', which were often used uncritically. The 'others' usually refer to the indigenous majority in Britain whose membership is perceived by most participants as privileged. 'Western' was most often used by the participants to define the majority and it reflects a typical comparison between the west and the east. The respondents also regularly used 'Britishness', 'whiteness' and 'Englishness' to describe the 'others'. The word 'outlander' ('Yang Ren' in Mandarin), which literally means people from the ocean, was used historically to describe people from places outside the land of China. Participants are no longer in China and some have never been to China. But some of them, especially Mandarin speakers, used this term to express a sense of otherness based on a symbolic connection to this home. Through the use of terms like 'outlander' and 'foreigner', the majority population of the host society are seen by the respondents as 'outsiders' in relation to the Chinese 'community'. Finally, 'ghost' ('Gwei Lo' in Cantonese, 'Gui Lao' in Mandarin, meaning foreign devil) was also used by some participants. Although it might not be used to express hate as during the First and Second Opium Wars, this term continues to suggest a clear distinction and was sometimes used to refer to the non-Chinese in general. Although these definitions of the majority are associated with different elements of identity, they will be used in this thesis to generally represent an idea of 'the other'. I would also note that some ethnic minority groups, such as Black people and Indians, are occasionally referred to as 'the others'. As Ryan (2010) argues, the notion of 'the other' refers to not just the majority but also other minority groups in the destination country.

It seems the multiple definitions of 'the other' are in line with the diversity of the city London which was suggested by some informants:

*Many races live together in London. (Fat Tse- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*London has the most races in Britain. (Pat Man- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*I meet ... people with different ethnicities. (Cali Lam- came from Hong Kong 2 years ago, on a spouse visa, studying at university)*

London, a city where 55% of the total population are ethnic minorities (ONS, 2011), provides people with the opportunity to interact with different races and ethnicities in

ordinary lives. These informants echoed an idea that they constructed various notions of 'the other' based on the diversity of this city.

However, as they emphasized the notion of Chinese 'community', many of them suggested that such diversity of the city does not stop them from holding on to a clear sense of Chinese distinctiveness. They seemed to believe that their regular contacts with other ethnic 'groups' make sense of their difference in the society. So as far as a fixed notion of Chineseness is concerned, the participants appeared to suggest that there could be many different 'others' but the Chinese are all the same. This sense of homogeneous Chineseness seems to fit with what Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992:158) call 'the melting pot does not melt'. The following sections will demonstrate this notion in detail, exploring how 'racial' and cultural features are used to define the apparent Chinese distinctiveness.

### **4.3 Racial identifications**

Many participants suggested that the notion of Chineseness is fundamentally constructed by 'racial' identifications. 'Racial' features such as appearance, bloodline and ancestral link are socially constructed to define the genetic distinctiveness of the Chinese.

#### **4.3.1 Appearance**

*Being Chinese is about appearance- yellow skin, black eyes and black hair. (Sarah Chen- student, came from China 4.5 years ago)*

*We all have yellow face and yellow skin. (Fat Tse- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*The appearance is completely different: they are white and we have a Chinese look. (Cali Lam- came from Hong Kong 2 years ago, on a spouse visa, studying at university)*

'Yellowness' was a common notion of Chineseness claimed by most participants. They assumed that the 'others' are all white and used the colour of skin (and sometimes of eyes and hair) to indicate a permanent visible feature of the Chinese. Symbolic meanings are attached to this physical feature, which sustains a sense of difference and foreignness in British society.

Such a feeling of foreignness was echoed by British Born Chinese (BBC) Pat:

*I actually don't have the English look- I am a foreigner. (Pat Man, BBC man, 20s)*

Pat was born and bred in London. He works in the government and owns a house in London. But he sees himself as a '*foreigner*' in London due to not being English in appearance. Like many other participants, he considered that being white is essential for being part of the indigenous majority. And because of his 'yellowness', he can never be '*white, white ghost*'. As far as Pat and many other respondents were concerned, various definitions of 'the other' such as 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' were closely linked with the notion of 'whiteness' which sustained 'their' 'racial' identity. Based on the 'racial' difference, Pat retains his belonging to the Chinese.

Pat also observed that the Chinese are viewed by the host community as having distinctive 'racial' features:

*They say the most special character of the Chinese is their eyes. (Pat Man)*

Pat's observation fits with previous research which states that while Chinese people focus on their 'yellow skin' as the physical indicator of difference, for western people the shape of the eyes tends to be seen as the distinguishing features (Sales et al., 2011). What is worth noting is that eye shape had not been mentioned by the participants except for Pat, although many of them had regular contacts with non-Chinese people. Following the same pattern, the participants' perception of their 'yellowness' may vary from the way the others think of the Chinese. So how the participants perceived their visible features is different from how others perceive the Chinese. And it will not be a surprise to see the participants' perception of 'others' differ from how the 'others' perceive themselves. This is in line with Wallman (1978) who notes that two sets of people may not put the line of difference between them in the same place. But in a performance, a definition of the situation needs to be agreed (Goffman, 1959). So the participants seemed to perform their construction of a Chinese 'community' by assuming that the 'others' agree to their definition. Since I am Chinese, the participants might have focused on presenting this Chinese version of Chineseness in our conversations. Therefore, the idea of ethnic differences is portrayed by the opposition between these notions of identities which are assumed and socially retained.

#### **4.3.2 Bloodline**

Perceived as genetically creating the visible features of the Chinese, the concept of bloodline ('xue tong' in Mandarin) was emphasized by some participants such as Lap, Peter and Sally:

*Bloodline is a physical aspect of being Chinese. (Lap Smith- BBC, parents came from Kenya)*

*Even if I don't admit I am Chinese, when I cut my wrists, the blood that comes out is still Chinese blood. (Peter Cheung- refugee, came from Vietnam 30 years ago)*

*Being Chinese is about having Chinese bloodline ... because the parents are Chinese. (Sally Yang- student, came from China 7 years ago)*

For these participants who came from different backgrounds, Chinese bloodline symbolically constructs a 'racial' boundary of the Chinese. The idea of 'Chinese' bloodline seems to be used to clearly and distinctively represent Chineseness, although the 'Chinese bloodline' might have lost its 'purity' as history goes on, such as in the six decades' Mongolian conquest and intermarriage in 1200s. The notion of identities is constantly developed. And what makes sense as being Chinese for many informants is how Chineseness is constructed in society rather than the more challenging historical account. Peter describes here that his Chinese bloodline can be proved when he cuts his wrists. But people would not really exercise this practice to examine their ethnic identity and how the Chinese nature would be indicated in the examination is another question. As echoed by Sally, they construct an idea that people born of Chinese parents are Chinese, which has been suggested by Christiansen (2003). The idea of Chinese bloodline is a symbol defined by these Chinese participants and shared among them.

#### **4.3.3 Ancestral link**

For the participants, being Chinese was not only about maintaining a 'bright' boundary, but also about retaining their orientation to a home. This home, as far as this homogeneous 'community' is concerned, is the ancestral home China. As the participants suggested, '*our ancestors were born in China*' (Helen Chan), '*our roots are in China*' (Sarah Chen) and '*our ancestors all came from China*' (Ching Tse; Peter Cheung). Although the participants were born in different countries across Asia and Europe, this ancestral link with China was claimed by all individual interviewees and most focus group participants. They considered this link as a commonality among the



Chinese. And such a social construct created a feeling of kinship and belongingness as echoed by Sally:

*It's like ties of kinship. We belonged to the same family five thousand years ago.*  
(Sally Yang)

This student from China seemed to believe that Chinese people all originated from this 'one family'. Such an idea of home is imagined, but it firmly sustains an 'us' mentality. Sally's statement is in fact a well-known Chinese saying. The '*five thousand years*' would always remain although time goes by. While the participants held on to the myth of this connection, it appeared to be unimportant for them where ancestors originated prior to dwelling in China.

The 'racial' identification of appearance, bloodline and ancestral link seems to be largely constructed in symbolic terms. However, the notion of ancestral link also involves material representations. The belonging to China is often retained through the practice of ancestor worship in the participants' family home. For these overseas Chinese, the symbolic and material representations of this ritual sustain their connection to the imagined home China. This is how the participants described such a ritual:

*Worshiping the ancestors is a must for the Chinese. (Sally Yang- student, came from China 7 years ago)*

*We worship our ancestors at home in festivals. ... My parents always sang a prayer starting with 'coming to our home... eighteen generations of ancestors'. ... A symbol has been staying in my mind ... in terms of how the ancestors survived in Fujian China. (Peter Cheung- refugee, came from Vietnam 30 years ago)*

*At Chinese New Year Eve, she [my mum] cooks dinner and invites our ancestors to come and eat. Throw the coins, (they) come and eat; we leave it for a while; throw the coins again meaning that they finish their eating; and we can eat ourselves. We burn paper money as well. (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

As discussed in Chapter 3, BBC Sophie gave me an impression at the beginning of the interview that she was very 'westernized'. But there was a common notion of Chineseness that she perceived, and ancestor worship was an important element of it. According to Sophie, following the fixed routine of worshipping is what it is to be Chinese. Goffman (1972) notes, that ritual establishes a sense of normality by defining a sense of continuity with the past and predictability of the future. The ritual of ancestor worship made sense of the participants' idea of an ancestral link and therefore ensured a Chinese identity. They retain this ritual by providing food, 'eaten' by ancestors before living family members eat and receive blessings. They burn paper money, so that

ancestors can 'spend' it. And they throw coins and sing prayers, to invite ancestors and guide them through their 'visit'. These norms are given meanings and are materialized through the use of food, paper money and coins. Such 'racial' identification is a significant part of cultural constructions of Chineseness such as family bonds, food and festival celebrations.

It could be argued that the practice of ancestor worship is informed by the concepts of Confucianism. Confucianism stresses interdependent relationships where people are expected to act according to their position. Confucianism emphasizes a hierarchical structure and an idea of loyalty. The norm of living family members providing continuous happiness and well-being to the deceased families signifies the respect towards the deceased and the unity of family. It espouses the value that original family relationship remains intact despite death and juniors are required to remain loyal to the seniors. There therefore seems to be a religious impact on the construction of the notion of Chinese 'community'.

This section has reviewed a shared notion of Chineseness which suggests that all Chinese have the same 'racial' features of appearance, bloodline and ancestral link. Perceived in a genetic way, these markers are utilized by the participants to make sense of their difference and foreignness in the host society and to create a sense of belonging. This 'racial' identity seems to put the participants in a safety zone where the rules are followed naturally. No one seems to question such social constructs, questioning for instance why the skin is viewed as 'yellow', how the bloodline is measured as Chinese, and why people would ignore the possibility that the ancestors might have come from different places prior to dwelling in China. Alba (2005:21) notes that race creates a boundary which is often uncrossable. Maybe due to this 'uncrossable' nature, it fundamentally builds up the fixed and clear notion of Chineseness. Some informants therefore refer to their 'racial' identity as a naturalized truth, a '*fact*' that '*you can't get away from*' (Lilly Hoang).

The 'racial' identifications function closely with some cultural elements of Chinese identity. A shared idea of Chineseness is created through the interplay between 'racial' and cultural identifications and the latter will be addressed next.

#### **4.4 Cultural identifications**

A cultural boundary of Chineseness is socially constructed to represent the apparent distinctiveness of the Chinese way of life. The participants' cultural classification is mostly defined through their food, language, family bonds and image of Chineseness.

##### **4.4.1 Food**

Food has been identified by the majority of the participants as an important marker of Chineseness. As an arena where the repetitive practices of everyday life take place, food creates a sense of familiarity and normality; its tastes and smells sustain the idea of belonging to the Chinese; and the sensory pleasures involved satisfy certain physiological needs. As people suggested, *'food culture is very important for the Chinese'* (Hou Chan), *'Chinese people are very concerned about food'* (Amanda Xiao) and *'normally Chinese people would have Chinese food'* (Ying Song).

According to the participants, Chinese food culture mostly concerns having rice, using chopsticks, the order of having food, and social relations built around food. As Fat echoed the shared view of having rice:

*Where there is rice-cooking there are Chinese people. (Fat Tse- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

In Fat's eyes, rice cooking and eating mark the Chinese boundary and unify Chinese people around the world. And so, the homogeneity of Chinese diaspora is highlighted. By comparison, wheat-based food was claimed as the culture of 'the other' by people like migrant Peng, and BBCs Pat and Lap. Such comparison ignores that people from Northern China tend to eat wheat-based food such as noodles and dumplings; in other parts of the world such as South Asia, rice may be also crucial; and finally wheat-based food may not be necessarily fundamental in every 'Western' country. However, along with the history that the majority of established Chinese migrants came from areas where rice-based food is essential, the stereotype of rice-eating is perceived by the participants as a distinctive Chinese feature.

In addition, using chopsticks was raised as a Chinese norm by some people such as Sally, Sarah, Lap and Pat. The 'others' were perceived as using fork, knife and spoon. Again this is a stereotype, ignoring the common use of chopsticks in other oriental cultures such as the Japanese, or the use of hand in some Asian cultures.

In terms of the order of having food, Rachael noted a repeated point:

*Western people drink soup before the main meal but we drink soup after. (Rachael Wong- came from Belgium 4.5 years ago)*

Using this opposite order, Rachael, who was born and bred in a western society, asserts an 'us' mentality here. She appears to believe all Chinese would follow the same order of having soup after the main meal.

Finally, as Lee echoed:

*All Chinese people socialize with food. (Lee Sung- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

Lee works for an advertising company and his colleagues are mostly non-Chinese. Compared with his colleagues who 'enjoy going to the pub after work', Lee enjoys 'going to a restaurant for food because that's a very Chinese thing to do'. According to Lee and many other participants, food and eating is able to generate a strong sense of harmony in social relations. Harmonious social relations are considered by them as crucial in the culture, which is in line with the emphasis of interdependent relations in Confucianism. We would argue that social relations around food are crucial in all cultures. But these participants portray it as distinctively Chinese in light of the concept of 'guan xi' (in Mandarin) in the culture. This concept stresses the importance of beneficial relationships, where contacts can be called upon when something needs to be done. These informants considered it an 'unwritten law' that Chinese people religiously respect and follow and closely related to the idea of 'face'. According to them, the Chinese often maintain harmonious social relations through food especially from the ways they pay for a meal and serve food at the dining table.

In terms of paying for a meal, Ching from Malaysia repeated a Chinese norm that having a meal together means one person paying for all. Acting according to this Chinese rule is believed to maintain a sense of normality and stimulate harmonious relationships. 'Paying for all' and 'paying for own meal' are therefore used by some informants to distinguish the cultures of the Chinese and the 'outlander' (Ching Tse).

Pat brought out another point shared with a few others:

*The Chinese serve food to seniors first while the Westerners serve guests first. (Pat Man- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

Pat suggested that in the norm of food serving, the emphases on seniority and hospitality draw a clear line between Chinese and western identities. Serving seniors first but guests later may appear to contradict the value of harmonious social relations. But some respondents suggested that this serving order is a crucial way of maintaining relations as respecting seniors is very important. In this notion of Chineseness, the food element of identity is intersected with another cultural aspect – strong family bonds.

While presenting the notion that all Chinese eat rice, use chopsticks, have soup after the main meal and develop social relations at the dining table, the participants have a generalised image of 'the other'. 'Their' food often means bread (Peng Choi, Pat Man), pizza (Fat Tse), fish and chips (Pat Man, Lilly Hoang) and going to the pub (Lap Smith, Hou Chan, Lee Sung, Lilly Hoang). As argued earlier, a notion of identity could be assumed, so to some extent these perceptions of 'British' food are stereotypes. And as the Chinese participants make assumptions of 'British' food, the non-Chinese could also have their stereotypes of Chinese food. For instance, they may consider 'fortune cookie' as Chinese but the participants did not believe so and, as a few suggested, such a concept does not even exist in China.

#### **4.4.2 Language**

*Chinese people speak Chinese. (Man Lam- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*We used written language to unify China so we have the same culture. (Ching Tse- came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

*The language, understanding it and I am trying to communicate with it. (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

As English provides a principal foundation for the formation of mainstream belonging, many respondents use Chinese language to define their cultural difference in UK society. The fact that most participants speak English and some non-Chinese are able to speak Chinese does not appear to disrupt this apparently clear division.

Ching suggests here that the homogeneity of the Chinese may be better sustained by written language, in light of the history of unifying China in Qin dynasty where a written language was formalised. But despite the variety of Chinese dialects, being able to speak Chinese was considered to be more crucial for being Chinese. In the participants' ordinary life in Britain, there seems to be a higher possibility of speaking Chinese than

writing and reading Chinese. So maybe based on this everyday experience, spoken language is more often used to make sense of their ethnic identity.

Chinese and English languages have many significant differences. Most aspects of the Chinese phonology and grammar systems differ from English. Instead of using letters or alphabets to construct words, Chinese use a logographic system where symbols represent the words themselves. Participants may therefore experience great difficulties such as in pronouncing with correct intonation, spelling words and reading English texts. As Peng gave an example of the early arrivals:

*They had to make a gesture of chicken when they wanted to buy eggs. (Peng Choi- came from Hong Kong 30 years ago).*

Peng vividly portrayed a barrier between Chinese and the majority due to the language difference. His quote suggests that in the process of meeting physiological needs in everyday life, using a minority language makes non-English speaking Chinese people feel an outsider in UK society.

Literacy and the accent and fluency of spoken language require a certain degree of capacities and skills. Thus, language acts as a certificate, not just marking the boundary of Chineseness but also proving an individual's Chinese membership. This view was repeated by Hou when he said:

*You may look Chinese, eat Chinese, but I think you really need to be able to communicate... to almost be comfortable with Chinese. (Hou Chan- BBC)*

Because the capacity of speaking Chinese is so crucial for being able to claim a Chinese identity, BBC Hou went to stay in China for a year, and improved his Chinese language skills and hence Chinese identity. The degree of language skills is directly related to a level of confidence and self-esteem in identities. Compared with me who speak fluent Chinese, some participants who have limited capacity in speaking Chinese often showed their lack of confidence in their Chinese identity. In this case, a shared notion of Chineseness based on language is questioned.

#### **4.4.3 Family bonds**

*Definitely one element that makes us Chinese is the family. ... When I came to my parents saying ... how I want to take the business, they said ... 'we work this hard, so you don't have to'. ... Everything they do is for the kids. (Hou Chan)*

Another common notion of Chineseness echoed by BBC Hou was the idea that Chinese people have strong family bonds. Hou's parents run a Chinese restaurant in Surrey. Since his parents want him to have a better life other than working long hours in the restaurant, he learns about the love and responsibility that his parents have for him. Hou then combines the idea of family bonds with what it is to be Chinese, where family bonds become a notion of Chinese identity and make sense of his experience as a Chinese person in Britain. In our conversation, Hou told me later that his cousin tricked the mother out of lots of money. What these Chinese people did obviously was not consistent with the idea of strong family bonds. But as far as the idea of a Chinese 'community' was concerned, Hou seemed to believe that all Chinese have strong family bonds.

Like Hou, many participants in this study portrayed family bonds as distinctively Chinese. The definition of family includes not just nuclear family but also extended family. Through the emphasis of family relations, the influence of Confucianism on Chinese identity is again evident. The participants seemed to perceive that strong family bonds are not seen in other cultures. They constructed this idea by imagining and assuming that all members of other groups, especially the majority, have weak family values. As two BBC informants suggested:

*In Chinese values you have family bonds and your priority is your family, whereas it is quite different from Europe where people become independent very early. (Lap Smith- parents came from Kenya)*

*Maybe generally White people want their kids to be independent so once the kids are 21 you are financially on your own. But with Chinese persons, the parents help you with the first money (deposit) for the house. (Lee Sung- parents came from Hong Kong)*

Lap and Lee have regular contacts with individuals of the majority group. Lap studies at university and he considers his social contacts as mostly 'English'. Lee works with non-Chinese and lives with his girlfriend who is 'white'. Both Lap and Lee imagine that all whites and Europeans have weak family values. As presented in his quote, Lap assumed that all people in Europe are the 'others' who are clearly different from the Chinese. Based on this cultural difference, Lap implied his feeling of being an outsider in the society where he was born and bred.

According to Lap, Lee, Hou and many others, family bonds are largely expressed by parents' responsibilities for children. Since the participants suggested that property ownership is important for the Chinese, some of them believed that a key responsibility

of the parents is helping their children to buy a house. When the parents were young they might not have expected such duty from their parents, because buying a house at that time was less common. Although they might not have received much financial support from their own parents, these Chinese parents, according to some participants, are eager to provide financial support for their children. In fact, we could argue that many of the 'others' also help their children in buying a house and the majority 'group' is very diverse. So this cultural difference is a stereotype, constructed by the participants to create a feature of the imagined Chinese community.

Apart from parents' financial responsibility for the children, another element of family bonds brought out by some respondents is the respect that seniors receive from juniors. This is in line with Collins (2001) who suggests that seniors of a Chinese family often have both responsibility and authority over the juniors. Stressing the importance of respecting seniors, some respondents stated:

*Chinese culture is about respecting seniors and filial piety to parents. (Amanda Xiao- 30s, came from China 16 years ago)*

*Chinese kids are more respectful. ... You don't talk back to your parents, granddad ... If you do, you will be punished, seriously punished. (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*Because you do respect the elders, you always listen to what they say, do what they ask and don't question them. (Lap Smith- BBC, parents came from Kenya)*

These participants echoed a perception that the authority of seniors is unchallengeable. We could argue that the respect for seniors protects the authority and esteem of seniors. It highlights a hierarchy of the family, and as Baker (1981, cited in Parker, 1993) notes, reflects the influence of Confucianism in shaping ideas of the family.

The Chinese norm of respecting seniors is expressed in the practice of ancestor worship discussed earlier. It is also demonstrated in the use of language as some participants suggested. So 'when addressing people, we use specific words ... to distinguish people older and younger than our parents' (Amanda Xiao) and 'if you go to a Chinese family, you would greet them (seniors) as aunty and uncle' (Pat Man). While the participants constructed the idea of a Chinese 'community', they assumed that these cultural norms are distinctively Chinese and did not take into account that such norms may be also followed in many other cultures.



In order to maintain the authority of seniors, the participants suggested that Chinese people do not openly express their emotions to each other. Juniors are required to obey and respect seniors without emotional expression, and seniors may need to demonstrate their authority by restricting their positive emotions towards juniors. This view was echoed by Sarah and Lilly whose families settled in China and Britain respectively:

*Chinese people ... tend to scold. They would say 'you stupid boy'. In English culture, these things are expressed with love. (Sarah Chen- student, came from China 4.5 years ago)*

*That's part of the Chinese culture. People don't talk to the family about their feelings. (Lilly Hoang- 30s, came from Vietnam at the age of one)*

Not expressing their emotions openly has been reported elsewhere on Chinese overseas students in London (Lin, 2007) and the Chinese in Australia (Tannenbaum and Howie, 2010) (discussed in Chapter 2). Expressing love and emotions to family members seemed to be considered by the participants as a threat to authority in the family. Some participants argued that this cultural norm stops them from providing and receiving emotional support in their family. And it may appear that this lack of support contradicts the idea of strong family bonds. But to these participants, they seemed to believe that respecting family members' authority is an expression of family love and a condition to be fulfilled in order to maintain this love.

Therefore, strong financial support, respect for seniors and not expressing emotions openly are the key elements of Chinese family bonds in the eyes of the participants. These elements may not always appear in line with each other, but they intersect to create a sense of family cohesion. Sometimes, these norms of family bonds could go beyond family settings. For instance, some participants consider the idea of not openly expressing emotions as a Chinese norm even in public. In comparison, they suggested that the 'others' often express more openly '*with love*' as Sarah mentioned above. This notion of mainstream identity is to some extent considered as a privilege especially for the newcomers like Sarah.

#### **4.4.4 Image of Chineseness**

*We [Chinese] are kind of quiet people. We get on with our life, make great money. (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

This quotation from Sophie echoes another shared notion of Chineseness. As she suggested, the Chinese are quiet in the host society as they maintain their way of life

exclusively within the 'community'. On the other hand, they are active in UK society in terms of seeking financial success. The combination of quietness and activeness is portrayed by some participants as representing the socio-economic status of the Chinese, an image of the 'community'.

Several informants stressed the importance of festival celebrations and 'face saving' in defining a Chinese way of life. They suggested that these are Chinese features which are not necessarily recognized by the non-Chinese.

Participants such as Sally, Cali and Ching noted the cultural distinctiveness of celebrating Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. Chinese New Year celebrations have been promoted in the mainstream under the agenda of multiculturalism (Sales et al., 2009). But the informants highlighted that the celebrations contain deeper meanings for the Chinese and include special practices exclusively followed in the 'community'. For instance, they cited the practice of giving red packets, where money in a red envelope is given to seniors and unmarried juniors. In the respondents' eyes, a red packet represents a symbol of energy, happiness and good luck for the New Year. A shared notion of Chineseness is believed to be greatly expressed through this simple practice of giving money in a red envelope. Customs of festival celebrations are also closely linked to worshipping ancestors and having Chinese food. In believing that all Chinese people adhere to these cultural practices, the participants have constructed an idea of an 'imagined community'.

Apart from festival celebrations, some informants suggested the importance of 'saving face' for Chinese people:

*Protecting the 'face' ... My mum will never ever say sorry even though she's wrong. ... You attend someone's wedding to give her a 'face'. (Lee Sung- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*'Saving face' is important. It shapes everything we do. (Amanda Xiao- 30s, came from China 16 years ago)*

*Chinese people don't like to say 'no'. ... They are concerned about their face so they are also concerned about other people's 'face'. (Ching Tse- came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

These participants argued that 'face saving' is essential for everyday interaction between Chinese people and is almost like an 'unwritten law' in the 'community'. Such importance of 'face' in Chinese culture has been mentioned in previous studies (Sales et al., 2009; Lin, 2007). The participants stressed that 'face saving' is an image of the

Chinese which is only defined and known by the Chinese and not the 'others'. Goffman (1972:20) states that individuals in society wish people to think highly of them and wish to maintain the harmony of relations, and they may therefore adopt strategies to protect their honour and prestige. Although the idea of 'saving face' is universally important, participants portrayed this as distinctively Chinese in line with their emphasis on harmonious social relations ('guan xi').

Some participants considered their emphasis on 'face' in opposition to the 'foreigners' respect for personal choice, as Ching continued to explain:

*The foreigners ... give you freedom in life- I don't bother or interfere with you. The Chinese ... will speak behind your back and you cannot afford that. The Chinese are ... group animals. (Ching Tse)*

Ching suggested that, in comparison with the non-Chinese, Chinese people need to 'have face' in front of other people, so that these people do not criticize them. Ching is a gay man who grew up in Malaysia and came to Britain recently. He appeared to believe a clear distinction between Chinese and the non-Chinese regarding this 'face' issue. So being a gay man becomes a barrier for him to live comfortably in a Chinese world.

BBC Hou also spoke of the importance of 'face' and suggested that 'saving face' is 'where the pride comes'. We could argue that saving each other's 'face' to some extent protects people's esteem and pride. Through this 'unwritten law', 'normal' practices and customs in the culture are prioritized over personal views in order to maintain honour and normality. It in a way strengthens the maintenance of Chinese rules and the notion of a cohesive 'community'.

Compared with festival celebrations and 'face saving', which are 'quietly' practised in the 'community'; the Chinese images of hard-working and achieving financial success are perceived by some participants as highly visible traits, which can be observed by outsiders.

A few informants proudly described an image of the Chinese that they are all hard-working:

*The Chinese in the old days worked very hard and the Chinese nowadays also work very hard. Look at those illegal Chinese migrants who sell cigarette on the street, they only get the two pounds from their hard work. (Peng Choi- came from Hong Kong 30 years ago, used to own a Chinese take-away in London)*

*The Chinese like working and do not like to get money from the government. (Pat Man- BBC man, works in the government)*

*If you are in a business context, Chinese people are known as the best people being hard working. (Rachael Wong- came from Belgium 4.5 years ago, works in banking)*

These participants vary in their backgrounds and of the jobs they do. But they shared this common notion of hard working, which they believed is well-known by the host society and gives them a sense of pride for being Chinese. Based on this Chinese norm, established migrant Peng found a commonality between him and illegal Chinese migrants. And like many others, he created an idea of a Chinese 'community'.

Many participants associated being hard-working with the Chinese not claiming welfare benefits and being inactive in politics (Chau and Yu, 2001). Coming originally from a state where welfare benefits are not widely accessible, these participants considered claiming benefits as a loss of 'face' and predispose them to being looked down on. To avoid embarrassment, people would distance themselves (Goffman, 1972), and therefore avoid claiming welfare benefits. Hence, the Chinese's low level of benefit claims (Chau and Yu, 2001) may not always reflect their low level of need but instead reflect their need to save 'face' and not be considered negatively by other Chinese.

Some informants suggested that, rather than focusing on political participation in the host society, the Chinese work hard for financial success. Aiming for financial success therefore becomes another marker of Chineseness. As two of them explain here:

*If there is a business opportunity, they (the Chinese) will go and take it. (Hou Chan- BBC)*

*We are away from home... We have to force ourselves to earn more money so that we feel stable. (Ching Tse- came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

BBC Hou made his statement based on observation of how his parents' generation developed food business in Britain. Hou grew up in Surrey where his parents run one of the two Chinese restaurants in their town. He witnessed the hard working and long working hours of the Chinese in the restaurant, and developed the idea that hard-working is what it is to be Chinese. For recent migrant Ching who worked in a Chinese take-away in London, financial success was essential for providing a sense of security. It could be argued that financial stability provides a sense of safety for individuals of any culture. But the respondents perceived that working hard for financial success is their

main way of seeking safety and stability in the host society. This Chinese culture provides a sense of pride and belonging to the imagined Chinese 'community'.

This section has presented a shared notion of Chineseness defined by the 'cultural' elements of food, language, family bonds and image of Chineseness. The narratives suggest that these resources combine and sometimes intersect, creating the notion of cultural 'community'. By assuming they all follow these cultural values and norms, the participants obtain a sense of normality, safety, love and esteem for being Chinese in the host society. The homogeneous notion of Chineseness is sustained by a cohesive notion of 'the other' which will be unpacked next.

#### **4.5 Notion of 'the other'**

While the participants construct a common notion of Chinese 'community', they also make generalizations about the 'others' and portray them as clearly different from the Chinese. They describe the non-Chinese in the aspects of 'race', 'culture' and citizenship. In this thesis, multiple definitions have been used to refer to a general sense of 'the other', but they are in fact associated with differing aspects of identity.

The 'others' the participants often refer to are the indigenous majority in Britain. 'Western' is how the participants define the majority community at least to begin with. It tends to represent a cultural boundary of majority identity as illustrated in earlier quotes from Pat, Amanda, Rachael and Sally. Although some might include Black people in the notion of 'westernness', many participants tend to only refer it to the whites in their definition. So the notion of 'westernness' involves the 'racial' identification of 'whiteness'.

'Whiteness' often defines the 'racial' boundary, according to the respondents, separating the Chinese from the majority society. The majority's 'whiteness' and the Chinese's 'yellowness' identify permanent 'racial' differences. The data suggest that 'whiteness' is important for defining 'Englishness' and 'Britishness', so 'whiteness' is crucial in the construction of the notion of 'the other'. Based on the visible differences of skin colour, an apparently clear distinction is constructed by the participants between the Chinese and the majority. Ching echoed this point when he suggested:

*Who they (the Chinese) are depends on ... whether the others, I mean the white people, accept them. ... They (the white people) won't see you as their own kind;*

*that's for sure because of your appearance, your skin colour. (Ching Tse- came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

Although some non-Chinese may find it difficult to define any difference between white and so-called 'yellow' skin, being white is visibly different from being 'yellow' according to Ching and some other respondents. Based on this social construct, they perceive the notion of 'whiteness' as a clear and fixed boundary that the Chinese would never be allowed to enter.

Furthermore, 'Englishness' according to some informants represents 'racial' and cultural features of the majority. A 'racial' boundary was echoed in Pat's description of '*the English look*', which entails an assumption that all English are also white. In terms of a cultural boundary, 'Englishness' is also defined as freedom of emotional expression as discussed earlier.

Last but not least, 'Britishness' primarily refers to citizenship in the participants' eyes and is represented by holding a British passport. There was a recurrent observation that British citizenship is becoming more exclusive. This has been raised by Ying, a Hong Kong migrant having been here for sixteen years, who suggested that '*law has changed*'.

A large proportion of the participants are in fact British citizens. But they all seem to perceive that 'British' are somehow different from Chinese. As British citizens Lee and Peter suggest here:

*If you are Black ... White... (or) Asian, you are British; but if you are Chinese ... they (the British) didn't think you are British. (Lee Sung- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*When I enter the UK border ... I feel they always look at my passport for a longer time compared with looking at the white people's. (Peter Cheung- refugee, came from Vietnam 30 years ago)*

The notion of citizenship appears complicated by its 'racial' and cultural meanings. According to some respondents, 'Britishness' could refer to the 'racial' aspect of 'whiteness' and the cultural elements of food and customs. Through the intersections and overlaps between citizenship, cultural belonging and 'racial' identifications, these people often noted in their description of Chinese 'community' that the Chinese are not 'British'.

Apart from the indigenous majority, the 'others' occasionally relate to some other ethnic minorities, notably including Indians and Black people. In terms of citizenship, these

minorities are assumed by some informants to be British citizens, so a line is drawn between Chinese and the British who could be from any other minority group. Lee's quote above reflects a perception that the participants may consider Black people and Asians as British and view the Chinese as not being British in order to stress Chinese difference in the host society. This clear distinction is constructed without taking into account that some Chinese are British citizens and some individuals of other minority groups may not be citizens.

In relation to a 'racial' identity, the way the participants perceive these minorities can be unfolded with two layers. When a personal issue is concerned, they clearly distinguished these minorities from the Chinese:

*I know traditionally- correct me if I am wrong, but I don't think I am- Chinese people can be just as racist as the other people in the world. I know a lot of Chinese people don't like Black people. (Hou Chan- BBC)*

BBC Hou commented that he has observed racial prejudice towards Black people. In addition, some participants went further by separating the Chinese from many other ethnic groups. Ying who works in the community suggests here:

*Just look at those Chinese elderly. ... They want their son to have a Chinese wife, not an English or an Indian, of course not one with black skin. (Ying Song- came from Hong Kong 16 years ago)*

Ying observes that some Chinese people would identify 'others' based on skin colour. So due to this visible feature, those Chinese people seem to perceive themselves as clearly different from the majority, Black people and Indians.

In political matters, on the other hand, some participants portray a 'racial' division between the white and the non-white, with the latter understood as being suppressed by the former. In this sense, the Chinese and other minorities are, as what Hou called, '*brothers and sisters*'. Although positioned on separate sides of the bright boundary, the social distance between Chinese and other minorities is so close that it begins to question the fixed and clear line.

With regard to cultural identification, a division between the majority and the rest is also emphasized. So the Chinese and other minorities are considered by some participants as sharing the same disadvantage against the background of western hegemony. BBC Lap spoke of this repeated view when he said:

*The West has proposed the standard of the world- we have human rights, business standards, laws. They clash with cultures. (Lap Smith- BBC, parents came from Kenya)*

In Lap's eyes, there is a clash between the 'West' and other cultures. The social distance between the Chinese and other minorities is again close. And as Lap asserts this division, he at the same time refers to the west as 'we' and seems to imply his dual membership. So the 'others', including the majority and other minorities, might not be always positioned on the other 'side'. And this reveals an ambiguous zone at the boundary of identities which will be explored in the next chapter.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated a shared notion of Chineseness, a perception that all Chinese share the features of what it is to be Chinese. Through 'racial' and cultural identifications, a 'bright' boundary and an orientation to the home China are constructed by the respondents to portray the apparent homogeneity within an imagined 'community'.

'Racial' identifications of appearance, bloodline and ancestral link, as well as cultural identifications of food, language, family bonds and image of Chineseness, combine, intersect and overlap to construct the participants' notion of Chineseness. Based on these features, the participants appear to consider that they, like all Chinese, are clearly different from the 'others'. They refer to the 'others' as mostly the majority but occasionally other minority groups. The notion of 'the other' also entails intersecting and overlapping identifications in 'racial' belonging, cultural identity and citizenship.

The participants' construction of the imagined 'community' can be understood as a quest for what Goffman (1972:49) refers to as 'normality' where their difference in the host society is made sense of. Additionally, it fulfils the needs for love where people feel a sense of belongingness to a group. Belonging to the 'community' also provides safety where the social situation becomes comfortable, predictable and organized. It brings pride especially when their membership is considered as privileged. So being Chinese in UK fulfils the safety, love and esteem needs identified by Maslow (1943:373).

The fixed and clear distinction between Chinese and the 'other' is imagined and assumed by the participants. While they engage with this shared notion of Chineseness in everyday life, the experience of being Chinese becomes complex and fluid rather than



fixed. A 'dance' that constructs a blurry boundary and multiple homes is performed, which will be demonstrated in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 5: 'Dancing' at the Boundary

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we focused on the participants' shared notion of Chineseness, emphasizing the apparently clear and fixed distinction between Chinese and the 'others'. As discussed, the participants constructed an idea of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006:6) through 'racial' and cultural identifications. Based on this notion of Chineseness, they appeared to believe that all Chinese including themselves maintain a group boundary of Chineseness and share the orientation to the home China, which differentiates them from those who are not Chinese. This shared notion of Chineseness will, however, be deconstructed in Chapter 5 and 6. These two chapters explore the performance and interpretation of Chinese identity in the participants' everyday experiences. The data suggest that although they hold on to the perception of an imagined community, the notions of boundary (Chapter 5) and home (Chapter 6) are negotiated in a complex 'dance', which constantly shifts in accordance with specific social contexts.

In this chapter, I will present the 'dance' at the boundary, a boundary assumed to be 'bright' but indeed performed as 'blurry' with overlapping and shifting identities. This chapter will first provide an overview of the blurry boundary. It then moves on to the main focus of the chapter, which analyzes the 'dance' at the boundary shaped by individual backgrounds. Finally, it explores individual motivations that drive such dynamic negotiations of Chineseness.

### 5.2 A blurry boundary

Rachael's story will start the analysis of the blurry boundary as it most vividly showcases overlapping and shifting identities. Rachael, a girl in her late 20s, was born in Belgium and came to work in London four years ago. From the moment we sat down in the interview, she started passionately stressing her position on the Chinese 'side' of the fixed line:

*I can say I am very traditional, very Chinese. For example, I prefer a Chinese partner. ... I only hang out with Chinese people. (Rachael Wong)*

Like many other informants, Rachael started her conversation by presenting a clear and fixed boundary of the Chinese 'community'. She emphasized an unambiguous distinction between the Chinese and the non-Chinese which was discussed in the last chapter. Referring to this common notion of Chineseness, this European born and bred Chinese woman described herself as '*never westernised*', always fixed on the Chinese 'side' of the ethnic boundary. The preference for a Chinese partner and her regular Chinese contacts were used by her to suggest this position. When Rachael presented me with this clear idea of being Chinese, I had the same idea about her. I knew Rachael from a friend and before the interview we had met in a few personal occasions. From our past communication, she did appear to have a strong sense of Chineseness. I always wondered how Rachael, who was born and bred in a western society but appears to be quite 'Chinese', performs her identity in everyday life; and the interview provided a platform for Rachael and me to explore it.

In order to further stress her strong sense of Chineseness, Rachael noted her difference from some BBCs:

*Certain BBCs cannot speak the language ... always hang out with English people. That is not Chinese, different from me. (Rachael Wong)*

Based on her Chinese language capacity and Chinese contacts, Rachael placed herself on the Chinese 'side' of the boundary. In her eyes, certain BBCs tend to claim identity of the host society, so she positioned them on the 'English' side. Revealing this difference within the Chinese started to challenge her initial notion of Chineseness where she assumed all Chinese share commonalities of what it is to be Chinese. As the interview progressed, the heterogeneity of the Chinese began to surface and the fixed boundary of Chineseness started to be deconstructed.

In fact, through our discussion, I noticed that Rachael sometimes adopts a western identity too. As she interprets the notion of Chineseness such as language and food, she claims multiple identities:

*My mother tongue is Chinese, but still my other mother tongue is Flemish as well. ... I think it's the same with the British Born people because at the end of the day we are brought up here.*

*My Mum is not here anymore so... at home I eat less Chinese now, sorry.*

*Well, what I mean (by a Chinese partner) is Chinese people grew up in Europe, like myself, European Chinese people. (Rachael Wong)*

As well as speaking Chinese and having Chinese food, Rachael speaks fluent English, considers Flemish as her other mother tongue, and eats more 'western' food while away from her family. She insists on her preference for a Chinese partner; but her definition of a Chinese partner is someone of Chinese origin who grew up in Europe like herself, and in other words, someone who has certain European mentality. Multiple identities including Chineseness, European identity and Belgianness are therefore claimed by Rachael, and her boundary of Chineseness is experienced as 'blurry'. A 'blurry' boundary, according to Alba (2005), involves an ambiguous zone where multiple identities overlap and the distinctions between identities become cloudy. At a blurry boundary, individuals are seen as members of the groups on both sides simultaneously or sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other (Alba, 2005:21-22). At these blurry boundaries, Rachael shifts her location in the ambiguous zone, negotiating her belonging among multiple identities and performing a 'dance' of Chineseness.

Rachael's 'dance' of Chineseness is shaped by her backgrounds such as the choice of partnership, place of origin and personal relationships. Rachael used her preference for a Chinese partner to prove her Chinese identity and the definition of 'Chinese partner' was then informed by her place of origin. Based on her Chinese language and contacts, Rachael moved away from some BBCs; but considering that they all grew up in Europe, she moved towards them and 'danced' together with them away from the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary. Different individual backgrounds intersected and overlapped to define her idea of who she is and her commonalities and differences in relation to other people. The ideas of 'us' and 'them' became no longer static and fixed.

Goffman (1959) notes a performance involves interaction between a 'dancer' and an 'audience'. The 'dance' of Chineseness is hence performed in the negotiation between the participants and their audience. It is presented in the above quotes that Rachael constructed her idea of what it is to be Chinese in relation not just to 'westerners', but also to BBCs, her mother and me who are also Chinese. Although the literature (Wallman, 1978; Zolberg and Long, 1999; Alba, 2005; Anthias, 2001) suggests that ethnic identity is constructed based on differences between a group and 'others', Rachael's identification reveals a common experience shared among the participants that the idea of being Chinese is constructed in relation not just to the non-Chinese, but also to other Chinese people.

Rachael repeatedly said 'sorry' to me, another Chinese person who then placed her at the 'western' end of the Chinese boundary:

*I also cook Chinese food, but not much. Sorry.*

*I don't feel I am Chinese when I am at work. Sorry. (Rachael Wong)*

Maybe Rachael realized the contradiction between the overlapping identities and her fixed notion of Chineseness, although such contradictory elements of identification both reflected her experience of being Chinese in a western society. Rachael might be also aware of the fact that she is not always very 'Chinese'. So as Goffman (1959) notes, when a person feels discredited, individuals may pretend nothing has changed in order to 'save face'. It was discussed before that the Chinese consider 'saving face' important, so maintaining the original definition of what it means to be Chinese could be crucial for Rachael. Her repeated expressions of 'sorry' to me revealed a degree of shame in either changing her mind or showing that she did not always comply with what she first saw as Chinese identity. A 'dance' of Chineseness was driven by the motivations to protect her pride and sense of normality.

Rachael's negotiation of identity illustrates the 'dance' at the blurry boundary of Chineseness and this experience of the 'dance' was commonly shared among the participants. Despite the perception of apparently clear and fixed division between the Chinese and the non-Chinese, the boundary of Chineseness is in fact 'blurry'. The participants place themselves and are placed by others at the blurry boundary, where their position shifts in the ambiguous zone. In their everyday life, what it means to be Chinese is no longer clear cut but involves intersections and overlaps with other identities. And because of such dynamics of identification, the heterogeneity of the Chinese emerges. The construction of blurry boundary and the heterogeneity of the Chinese will be discussed in this section.

### **5.2.1 Boundary crossing and blurring**

*When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Chinese people are always like that. Coming to their country, you need to learn their culture. (Peng Choi- 60s, came from Hong Kong 30 years ago)*

*I don't know much about the very traditional Chinese culture, because I don't really get to use it here. (Pat Man- 20s, BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

While the participants hold on to a sense that the distinction between Chinese and majority identities is clear and fixed, they notice they somehow acquire some attributes

of the majority culture and abandon some Chinese rules. For BBC Pat who considered himself '*a foreigner*' in Britain, he does not follow the Chinese culture relating to the serving order at the dining table. By serving guests first and seniors later, he finds he has become the 'other'. It was discussed in the last chapter that migrant participant Peng constructed an apparently fixed notion of Chineseness based on orientation to China and image of hard-working. While maintaining the perception that Britain is '*someone else's country*', Peng notes that he needs to learn their culture where a sense of attachment is implied. This man in his 60s echoes that being flexible to fit into a host culture is considered to be a distinctive Chinese feature.

It is interesting to see such contradiction between the participants' fixed notion of Chinese 'community' and the flexibility that they allow themselves to proclaim multiple identities. But this was a common experience which was also argued by Lap:

*The Chinese go over the world, make communities and make that home their home. It's very common actually for the Chinese mentality to just fit in very comfortably wherever they need, but they still hold on to their own Chinese culture.*  
(Lap Smith- BBC, parents came from Kenya)

Lap has families in West Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Australia, and Brighton and London in Britain. He echoed an idea that the Chinese can just fit in wherever they live, and this reflects a cosmopolitan disposition where people consume multiple cultures and places. According to Lap and many others, however, this flexibility does not seem to disrupt their perception of Chinese community which is assumed and imagined. The data suggest that the notion of imagined community sustains a sense of essence that makes sense of the Chinese difference in a host society, while their multiple attachments to cultures and places enable them to adapt, and to achieve financial success particularly.

BBC Hou, migrant participant Ching and some others argue that financial success motivates Chinese people to participate in the host society and construct a mainstream identity. Hou suggested that as long as there are opportunities for financial achievement, Chinese people will run businesses for the non-Chinese and adopt culture of the host society. What these participants suggested in relation to the Chinese in Britain is in line with Gosling (1983, cited in Ha, 1998) who studies the Chinese in Malaysia and Thailand and argues that they often change their identity in order to obtain economic success. Lap also observed a similar trend for the Chinese in Africa. So considering that the Chinese are a classic 'trade diaspora' (Cohen, 1997, cited in Sales et al., 2009:5), it is not surprising to see financial success as their key motivation to adapt to a host society.

Banton (1983) argues that if an identity is considered a privilege, there is an incentive for others to adopt aspects of it. As Zolberg and Long (1999) note, the majority group of a host society often have the upper hand. So although many participants were proud of the perceived Chinese cultures of strong family bonds, being hard working and being financially successful, they generally considered the majority identity as privileged. And according to some respondents, this privileged status of the majority is also shaped by a mentality of western supremacy. We may argue that China has rapidly developed and Chinese culture becomes increasingly privileged. But participants like Lap, Hou, Sarah and Amanda still considered western supremacy as the trend of '*the whole generation*' (*Lap Smith*) affecting the Chinese across the world through education, food, language and lifestyle. Amanda, for instance, demonstrated that western culture is popular in China and it strongly influences Chinese culture:

*In China ... we used to think McDonald and KFC as Western food, but now China has its own brand of fried chicken and own brand of hamburger. (Amanda Xiao-30s, came from China 16 years ago)*

Amanda came from China sixteen years ago when she was a teenager, and she visits her family in China on a regular basis. Amanda notes that some aspects of western culture such as the concepts of fried chicken and hamburger have been added to Chinese culture. What Amanda and a few others observed reveals that, because of western supremacy, not just Chinese identity in Britain intersects with western identity, Chineseness in the 'homeland' also develops in a way that it interplays with 'westernness'. So both in Britain and China, the boundary of Chineseness is not clear and fixed as it appears to be.

Many participants therefore suggested that there were incentives to adopt some aspects of mainstream identity and they often 'cross' the boundary in order to do so. Boundary 'crossing', as Zolberg and Long (1999:8-9) define, is a form of negotiation where individuals change by acquiring some attributes of the host identity without any change of the receiving society. Culturally, respondents sometimes follow 'other' rules especially in terms of language, food and ways of expressing emotion. Although their 'racial' identity is complicated in terms of their link with the ancestral home China, they tend to believe the 'racial' boundary is 'uncrossable' (Alba, 2005:21). So it was common that they present themselves as 'racially' Chinese, but culturally they are flexible in proclaiming multiple identities. This pattern of boundary blurring seems to add to the growing body of research on the negotiation of multiple identities (Eriksen, 2012).

Meanwhile, some participants suggested that the 'others' in the host society also obtain certain attributes of the Chinese. As these BBCs echoed:

*They see our culture as non-trouble so they are open to it. (Lee Sung)*

*I hear a lot of people- Indian people, Black people, white people- they can speak fluent Mandarin. (Sophie Chow)*

Research has noted that China's role in the global world has become increasingly important (Pieke et al., 2004), and the contemporary Chinese population in Britain have developed a good image of economic and academic success (Sales et al., 2009). So in light of these, the participants suggested that Chinese culture is generally welcome in the UK, and some individuals from other groups have started to accept and adopt Chinese culture such as learning a Chinese language and eating Chinese food.

Chapter 2 noted that when boundary crossings occur on a large scale, the social structure is altered (Alba, 2005). Individual boundary crossings can generate a blurry boundary where the distinction between identities becomes ambiguous, and I would argue that this is the case for the participants' experience of boundary negotiation. Individual boundary crossings of the Chinese and the 'others' have arguably contributed to the construction of an ambiguous zone. As illustrated in Rachael's case, the participants tend to claim multiple identities as they are in this zone. The boundary of difference and meaning put upon difference (Wallman, 1978) is hence not fixed and static, but cloudy and fluid. For the participants, the boundary negotiations of Chineseness involve a combination of boundary crossing and blurring. This combination was demonstrated by Lee and Amanda:

*It is very difficult to think I am definitely British or Chinese. (Lee Sung- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*You want to stay with the community here but at the same time you don't want to forget about your roots. (Amanda Xiao- 30s, came from China 16 years ago)*

It was discussed in the last chapter that Lee started the conversation by presenting a common notion of Chineseness which suggested that the Chinese can never be British. Although he assumed the clear ideas of what it is to be Chinese and British, Lee found it difficult to define whether he is Chinese or British as his experience was explored further. In a way, the distinction between Chinese and British identities was so cloudy that the boundary of Chineseness became blurry. For Amanda, she perceived a clear distinction between the mainstream identity and Chineseness, and she suggested that she



constantly crossed the boundary and proclaimed both identities. Claiming these identities simultaneously reflected the ambiguous zone of the blurry boundary where identities overlapped and intersected.

The overlapping of identities performed by the participants is in line with Heath and Roberts (2008:2) who report that ethnic minorities in Britain show clear evidence of 'dual' rather than 'exclusive' identities. In addition, the 2011 census shows that more than 90% of the UK population identify themselves with a UK national identity (ONS, 2011), so we can argue that a large proportion of individuals from ethnic minorities actually claim the mainstream identity in UK society. In this study, the participants' boundary negotiation between Chinese and majority identities is the focus. But it needs to be noted that, for many respondents, their blurry boundary could also involve identities of other cultures such as Belgian identity for Rachael and Malaysian identity for Ching.

At the blurry boundary, the participants' location is indeterminate and I use the term 'dance' to highlight it. 'Dance' suggests constant movements of moving back and forth across the Chinese boundary and moving together and against each other in relation to the audience. Because of their changing locations, the participants construct shifting notions of 'us' and 'them'.

### **5.2.2 Sub-grouping the Chinese**

Chinese people may be positioned in different locations in the ambiguous zone and they may 'dance' towards different directions. So the homogeneity of the Chinese becomes questionable. As the participants negotiate ideas of 'us' and 'them' in the 'dance', other groups could sometimes become 'us' and the Chinese could become 'them'. Differences between the Chinese therefore emerge and as Lilly states, '*the Chinese population ... is not homogeneous*'.

When the participants describe differences among Chinese, they often apply a common form of sub-grouping and divide the Chinese population into established migrants, recent migrants and 'British Born Chinese' (BBC). I define established migrants as those who have been here for more than a decade and recent migrants as those who arrived within the last ten years. BBC is a term widely used by the Chinese to refer to those born in Britain of Chinese origin. Each sub-group is perceived by the respondents as having distinctive backgrounds in terms of place of origin and generation of migration and these backgrounds largely inform their differing negotiations of identity.

Although the subgroups differ mostly in terms of their cultural identity, they also vary in terms of their citizenship. Within the sample, the recent migrants have student or partner visas, without a secure immigration status. Their civil, political and social rights in the country are therefore restricted. Those respondents who are established migrants have been granted either permanent residency or naturalization of British citizenship and their secure immigration status entitles them to those rights. For those born in Britain, they have obtained British citizenship by birth. Unlike the cultural boundary which is blurry, the boundary of citizenship tends to be 'bright', which involves a clear distinction (Alba, 2005:22) between citizens and non-citizens. By obtaining British citizenship, people 'cross' (Zolberg and Long, 1999:8) this bright boundary. So as far as citizenship is concerned, recent migrant respondents are usually on the Chinese side and tend not to feel they belong to Britain. Those who are established migrants and BBCs are on the other side, who have crossed the boundary to become the British, the 'others'.

With regard to the differing cultural identifications of the sub-groups, it could be suggested that established migrants have a strong awareness of retaining Chinese culture. This common view was echoed by Amanda who has been here for 16 years:

*Maybe because I am abroad, I am very concerned about protecting my (Chinese) identity. My friends who have settled here are also very conscious about maintaining Chinese values, customs and traditions, and they always teach their second or third generation about these cultures. (Amanda Xiao)*

Amanda and a few others suggested that as migrants live here longer, some Chinese rules appear to be less applicable to them. As noted by Goffman (1972), we become aware of the rules when they are no longer taken-for-granted. So for the established migrants, the awareness of maintaining Chinese rules becomes strong in order to sustain their idea that they are Chinese. As Amanda also observed, many established migrants are parents or grandparents in the family, and they usually play an important role in the transmission of Chineseness through generations.

Meanwhile, some elderly participants who have lived here for long have difficulty in learning mainstream culture due to language barriers. The focus group participants demonstrated this point when they said:

*Language is a barrier for us. It stops us from learning the culture here. (Man Lam-came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*We do not understand English, so our neighbours always discriminate us. (Chun Song- came from Hong Kong 40 years ago)*

*Most of us the older people do not know English. ... We worked very hard and did not have time to study. Now we are retired and know nothing about how to deal with things like welfare benefits and arranging hospital appointments. So we ask for help, from the community centre. (Lum Choi- came from Hong Kong 37 years ago)*

These participants only speak Cantonese, have a low level of education (from none to secondary school) and receive mean-tested benefits. They spend most of their time in various Chinese community organisations in London, in Chinatown and at home, and have very limited connection with the mainstream. They manage to travel between those regular places without understanding English. For instance, they refer to a tube line not by its name but its colour, so they call Northern Line as 'Black Line'. Their limited capacity in obtaining the dominant culture also pushes them back to the community as they require help and language assistance to engage with the host society when necessary. Such experience of these established migrants fits with Kofman's (2005) argument that limited economic resources and cultural capital can stop people from proclaiming a majority identity.

For most of the recent migrant participants, they hold many attributes of Chinese culture and are confident in their Chinese identity. Meanwhile, their desire for becoming the 'others' is strong as they seek to belong, work, earn money and become 'normal' in the new society. As they feel secure in Chinese identity, they seem to have the confidence to embrace new traits. The recent migrants in this study are well educated and they all have a university degree. Either studying at university or working at banking or Chinese catering, they speak a sufficient level of English. Having these economic resources and cultural capital seems to enable them to adopt the dominant culture.

Some of the recent migrant participants particularly saw a change in how they express emotion. As Cali, Sally and Sarah noted:

*People here like to hug and kiss, so when you feel happy you hug. (Cali Lam- came from Hong Kong 2 years ago, on a spouse visa, studying at university)*

*If they (the non-Chinese) think you are beautiful, they will definitely tell you. ... I have started to learn from them. (Sally Yang- came from China 7 years ago)*

*Since I came here, I start to say, 'Mum, I miss you, how are you'. (Sarah Chen- came from China 4.5 years ago)*

Some respondents suggested in the last chapter that the Chinese tend to avoid expressing their emotions openly. After relocation, these recent migrants replace this notion of Chineseness by learning to express their emotions more '*openly*' (Sarah Chen, Sally Yang). This change also affects the communication with family back 'home'. Sarah, for instance, is keen to acquire this culture and use it while communicating with her family.

British born participants often mentioned a weak link with Chineseness and the dominance of the majority identity. Like the term 'American Born Chinese' (ABC) which implies the Chinese born in America have either rejected or lost their Chinese heritage (Louie, 1998), the term 'British Born Chinese' links to a typical perception among BBCs and other Chinese that these people are not '*real Chinese people*' (Pat Man). Using the metaphor 'banana' to describe himself and his BBC fellows, Pat explained:

*The outside layer of the banana is yellow- Chinese appearance; but inside it's more white, 'White ghost'. (Pat Man- BBC man)*

This reflects a common view of the BBC respondents who claim Chinese identity in a 'racial' sense. However, they identify themselves as 'westerners' in a cultural sense. Turning into 'ghost's character' ('gwei sing' in Cantonese) is a typical statement used by some participants to describe this 'westernized' subgroup and these BBCs seemed to agree to it. Performing and demonstrating their Chinese authenticity to me, a Chinese researcher born in China, these BBCs revealed feelings of insecurity. Hou, Sophie, Lee and Pat, for instance, showed a lack of confidence in their Chinese identity because of their lack of fluency in Chinese. They expressed the anxieties about being accepted as Chinese and an urge to strengthen the link with Chinese culture. These BBCs work as professionals in different fields and they all have a university degree. But being privileged did not seem to strengthen their capacity in retaining Chinese culture when they performed their 'dance' in front of me.

Alba (2005:24-25) notes that boundary blurring does not bring a rupture between participation in mainstream and minority identities as individuals are not forced to choose between the two. Nevertheless, these participants' negotiations at the blurry boundary suggest that they do not necessarily move freely between the two identities as they wish. The positionings involve a certain level of insecurity for the part of identity that the individual is not claiming in certain circumstances. In our conversations, those following a Chinese rule are concerned about how to make themselves 'normal' and how to be like the majority in the host society. Those adopting a western rule are urged

to maintain their idea of being Chinese. This sense of insecurity leads to constraints and tensions for the individuals. It could be argued that such constraints and tensions alert the individuals to the desires for reclaiming the needs and normality, which might constantly move the individuals in the ambiguous zone of the boundary and stimulates the shifting positionings.

The sub-grouping of the Chinese only provides a simplified description of their heterogeneity. Members of each subgroup can in fact differ from each other. The recent migrant participants are very diverse, for instance, who include students from China, people on a spouse visa, economic migrants and people moving within Europe. Informed by various individual backgrounds, the construction of the ideas of 'us' and 'them' could be far more complicated. As Lilly described:

*You can't really categorize anything anymore. ... You can't really say whether it's Chinese or not. (Lilly Hoang- 30s, came from Vietnam at the age of one)*

Ching's story can illustrate this complex negotiation of 'us' and 'them'. Ching is a gay man in his 30s who came to Britain six years ago. His sexual orientation was the reason why he came to this country. Having left a job at banking in Malaysia, this recent migrant now works as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant.

Although perceiving a clear boundary of 'us Chinese', Ching recalled that in the first one and a half year of arrival, he always 'danced' away from other Chinese people:

*If you come here for holiday, you definitely want to eat some more foreign food and see more foreigners. ... That was what it's like when I just came here.*

*I went to a pub and saw Chinese people but didn't want to make friends with them at all; ... I worked in a western restaurant and all the colleagues were westerners. (Ching Tse)*

Ching avoided any contacts with the Chinese and considered the Chinese in London as 'them'. He moved towards the non-Chinese, trying to '*integrate well*' by abandoning his Chinese identity and claiming a mainstream identity. He also wanted to get away from the social stigma of homosexuality in the Chinese community and obtain a sense of acceptance, safety and respect as a gay man.

However, after a while, Ching had to find a job in Chinese restaurants. He now works in a take-away and lives in free accommodation provided by the employer. As he works in the Chinese circle to secure financial safety, he has to reclaim an 'us' mentality with some Chinese people because he simply needs '*to survive*'.

An 'us' mentality was also called for because:

*I was nearly mad. I didn't have any Chinese friends or any close relationship with the non-Chinese. ... I stayed alone in a strange culture. (Ching Tse)*

Staying 'alone' in a 'strange' culture, Ching could not attach belonging to either the Chinese or the non-Chinese. He could not successfully claim a mainstream identity because as he suggested the white people will never fully accept the Chinese. Although Ching tried to cross the boundary, he was placed back to the Chinese side by the non-Chinese, so a Chinese identity was imposed on him. Meanwhile, Ching lost a sense of essence as he excluded himself from the Chinese and it made him 'alone' and 'mad'. As noted by Ryan (2010), diasporic experience involves not just adapting to new rules but also maintaining continuity with former frames of reference. So, moving back to the Chinese end of the Chinese boundary helped Ching to obtain a sense of normality and belongingness in this 'strange culture'.

The notions of 'us' and 'them' not just shift through time, but also change according to different contexts. As Ching continued to tell his story of reclaiming Chinese identity:

*Every time when ... I felt depressed, the depression would go away if I speak in Chinese ... and meet some Malaysian friends. (Ching Tse)*

Ching did not necessarily see all Chinese as 'us', but made a close connection with his Malaysian friends who speak Chinese. So the Malaysian Chinese remained 'us' while other Chinese people became 'them', and this identification was informed by the fact that Ching grew up in Malaysia.

Ching revealed another layer of his difference from other Chinese. He suggested that although he is interested in joining activities of established migrants and BBCs:

*I don't have the time for it. I don't have... the capacity either. (Ching Tse)*

Considering that he is a recent migrant and works full-time in the restaurant, Ching saw himself different from those Chinese people 'who have settled here'. Due to his migration background and employment status, he had to move away from those Chinese.

The negotiation of 'us' and 'them' also took place in his workplace. Ching asserted that although he maintained a good relationship with his colleagues, he did not mind having

confrontation with them or losing his job if they treated him unequally on the basis of sexual orientation:

*I don't hide purposely [that I am gay] because this is the most important part of myself. ... If anything conflicts with me being gay, those things become so tiny.*  
(Ching Tse)

While Ching performed his 'dance' to the colleagues, sexuality largely informed Ching's positionings. The influence of sexuality was so strong that 'ethnic identity' to some extent faded into background. This form of identification does not seem to fit with Zolberg and Long's (1999:8-9) categorization of boundary 'crossing', 'blurring' and 'shifting'. So I propose a form of boundary 'fading'. And by that, I mean 'ethnic identity' becomes less significant in certain circumstances as other facets of identity such as sexuality, gender and class become more salient in defining a sense of personhood. This is in line with existing studies which note that a sense of personhood is constructed through the intersection of various social identities (e.g. Anthias, 2001; Bhabha, 1994; Edwards et al., 2012), and ethnic identity is only part of it.

Ching therefore performed 'dances' to different audiences, including the non-Chinese, Malaysian Chinese, established Chinese migrants, British Born Chinese and his colleagues. In each 'dance', he placed himself and was placed by the audience in a location at the boundary, which defined his ideas of 'us' and 'them' in relation to the audience. These 'dances' were informed by Ching's backgrounds such as place of origin, generation of migration and, more importantly, sexuality. So Ching performed a series of 'dances' and constantly shifted his location at the blurry boundary of Chineseness. This experience of shifting identifications from Ching was shared with other participants. The following section will explore the key individual backgrounds that shape the participants' identifications at the blurry boundary. It will illustrate how the 'dance' of Chineseness is performed in those particular contexts.

### **5.3 'Dancing' at the blurry boundary**

The discussion of the 'dance' at the blurry boundary will start with Fat's 'dance'. Fat Tse is in his 70s. He migrated from Hong Kong 45 years ago. In the last chapter, he presented a clear boundary of the 'imagined community' which he defined by 'yellowness' and food. But as he performs and interprets the notion of Chineseness, the boundary is blurred and he positions Chinese people in different locations in an ambiguous zone:

*Those 'Fujian guys' ('Foczau zai' in Cantonese) won't join our Chinese centre because they have Fujian associations.*

*The younger generation have got into the ghost's character.*

*People have their own belief. Some choose Christianity and some choose Buddhism. (Fat Tse)*

The perception that all Chinese are 'fixed' on the Chinese 'side' of the boundary is replaced by their different positions in an ambiguous zone. Fat's quotes imply that based on a particular social context, Chinese individuals move towards certain Chinese people and move away from other Chinese. Place of origin generates differences between Fujian and Hong Kong people who seem to 'dance' away from each other. Place of origin also shapes a Chinese space, so Fat considered the Chinese centre where Hong Kong people are in the majority as different from Fujian associations. Generation of migration pushes the young Chinese away from Fat's generation. Fat positions the younger generation towards the majority end while his generation towards the Chinese end. Also according to Fat, the Chinese move away from each other due to the different religions they follow, most notably Christianity and Buddhism. Fat's observation represents a common experience that individual backgrounds shape the participants' identifications. And this 'dance' of Chineseness is informed by place of origin, generation of migration, religion, sexuality, gender and partnering.

### **5.3.1 Place of origin and generation of migration**

Place of origin and generation of migration most regularly influenced the participants' identifications. In the Chinese population in London, the established migrants are mostly from Hong Kong and Vietnam while a large number of recent migrants are from China and Southeast Asia. And increasingly, British-born second and third generations have become a permanent feature of the British society. So as echoed by Ching, the participants suggested that '*the biggest difference*' among the Chinese is between these different generations and their different places of origin. The term 'place of origin' becomes complicated when multiple scales of home are explored and the common notion of Chinese having a shared home is deconstructed, but in this chapter it only refers to the participants' primary idea of where they are from.

The 'dance' shaped by place of origin and generation of migration can be showcased from BBC Hou's experience. Hou speaks the most 'proper' Mandarin and has the most knowledge of Chinese culture among all the BBCs I have come across. He gained these



from one year experience in China as an English teacher. This BBC who appeared to have a strong connection with China does not have any friends in London who came from China. When we discussed this further, Hou told me a story of him coming back to university in London and negotiating Chineseness in relation to overseas students from China.

Hou was keen on communicating with the overseas students just after he came back from China:

*I always did the whole lots like 'hi, my name is xxx, used to be a teacher in China, I am from Shandong, how are you'. I always felt they weren't very open. I was always quite surprised because I thought they may be more willing to talk to me because I look Chinese. (Hou Chan)*

Simply 'looking Chinese' does not seem to be enough to be accepted within overseas Chinese students. One year's experience in Shandong province of China enabled Hou to be confident and proud to introduce himself as someone 'from Shandong', to those people who were born in China. As Hou strengthened the link with this Chinese 'homeland', he felt an enhanced sense of Chinese identity. The 'racial' identification of ancestral link and appearance enabled Hou to identify commonalities with the students and 'danced' towards them. However, as Goffman (1959) notes, a definition of the situation needs to be agreed between both parties in a performance, and how the audience see us influences our sense of self. Hou's definition of the situation did not seem to be supported by his audiences, the students who moved away from Hou. So Hou had to define a difference between these recent migrants and him- a BBC. By acknowledging that they were born in different countries and they belong to different generations of Chinese diaspora, Hou made sense of the students' reaction and their 'dancing' away from each other.

Like Hou, many participants perceived that migrant Chinese and BBCs often move away from each other. They suggested that migrant Chinese are positioned towards the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary whereas the British Born towards the majority end. This is in line with statistics in Heath and Roberts' (2008) study which states that the foreign born minorities often have a weaker sense of belonging to Britain.

In their identification around language for instance, although most participants speak both Chinese and English, BBC and migrant participants differed in their idea of what their first and main language is. Those who were born in the UK often noted their proficiency in English and some loss of Chinese. This is in line with Alba's (2005)

observation on the second generation of minorities in Europe and America. Since English is one of the official languages of Britain, it secures its privileged status. BBCs speak, read and write English well. So they are considered privileged by many Chinese people and this status allows them to criticize the migrants. As Hou argued, the migrants 'cannot speak English, lack of standard' (Hou Chan).

However, as the BBCs are positioned away from the Chinese end of the boundary, they usually have a low level of confidence in using a Chinese language. As Hou continued:

*I am not fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin. When I ... pronounce something incorrectly, I always feel ashamed. (Hou Chan)*

It was suggested before that speaking a Chinese language is used to prove the participants' Chinese membership. So for BBCs such as Hou, Lap and Sophie, being weak in their Chinese language often generates low self-esteem and confidence in Chinese identity. They are anxious about whether they are accepted by the Chinese, including me, and they urge themselves to learn Chinese.

Unlike the BBCs, many migrant informants considered a particular Chinese language as their first language. But this 'Chinese language' could mean different dialects depending on where they migrated from. As Sarah and Peng echoed:

*There is a Mandarin group and I feel closer to my own group members. (Sarah Chen – student, came from China 4.5 years ago)*

*The recent migrants may say 'ni zhen bang' in Mandarin (你真棒, meaning 'you are excellent'), but in Cantonese it sounds like 'lei zhen ban' which means 'you are stupid' (你真笨). (Peng Choi– came from Hong Kong 30 years ago)*

Mandarin and Cantonese are the most common Chinese dialects respectively used by recent migrants and established migrants. Sarah is a student from China and a volunteer Mandarin interpreter in a Chinese church. Although she speaks both Mandarin and Cantonese, she considers Mandarin as her first language and finds a closer connection with people speaking Mandarin. Her quote revealed a common experience shared among the participants that speaking the same dialect moves people closer to each other. Established migrant Peng further explained the difference between the Chinese. He argued that as recent migrants and established migrants speak different dialects, they move away from each other and experience 'a gap' that is difficult to bridge.

Apart from language, many respondents also suggested that people from different migration backgrounds differ in terms of their employment and financial success:

*Second generation work as doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers etc. (Man Lam- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*They (recent migrants) introduce each other for a job. How can our generation – established migrants - help them? (Helen Chan- came from Hong Kong 15 years ago)*

*Immigrants find it very hard to fit in. ... Chinese people born here are quite successful... working quite hard to get where we are. ... People coming to the country like my parents have had worked very hard ... so that they can have their kids born here in a better life. (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

Man repeated a shared view that BBCs are doing well socio-economically. They are placed towards the majority end of the Chinese boundary by other Chinese and majority society. The BBC participants also identified themselves as successful as Sophie suggests here. So in a sense, the BBCs place themselves and are placed by other Chinese and majority society to be at the majority end of the ethnic boundary.

Established migrant Helen and a few others assumed that recent migrants undertake low skilled employment in the 'community' where securing a job mostly takes place by word-of-mouth. This fits with a stereotype about recent migrants from Fujian province of China. Fujian is well known for the origin of many refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, so participants suggested that people from this region are considered by Chinese and the mainstream as socially disadvantaged. Based on this stereotype, recent migrants are placed to be far away from the 'western' end of the Chinese boundary. They are considered by some 'other' Chinese to have little ability or opportunity to access mainstream employment and '*find it very hard to fit in*' (Sophie Chow). This perception about recent migrants did not recognize the diversity in this sub-group. Recent migrants in this study, for instance, include people who are highly skilled and work in the mainstream. And as discussed earlier, most of these participants have the confidence and capacity to embrace new traits.

Unlike recent arrivals, established migrants are viewed by many respondents to be able to access many of the majority's resources. Because of this, participants such as BBC Sophie make a distinction between '*the immigrants*' meaning recent migrants and '*people coming to the country*' like her parents. As far as employment and financial success are concerned, established migrants seem to 'dance' away from recent migrants and move closer to the BBCs.

Therefore, place of origin and generation of migration influence how individuals position themselves, how they are positioned by majority society and how they are positioned by 'other' Chinese. Based on their commonalities and differences with regard to these migration backgrounds, the participants construct the notions of 'us' and 'them' in relation to their various audiences. In this 'dance', some claim the majority identity while some claim Chinese identity, and the positionings also vary according to a particular cultural element.

### **5.3.2 Religion**

Religion was also influential in shaping the participants' identifications. Some participants highlighted a connection between Chinese culture and Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. As Ching and Pan suggest here:

*Three religions- Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism- make up Chinese culture. (Ching Tse- Buddhist, came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

*The Chinese have a stronger sense of belonging to Buddhism. (Pan Chon- non-religious, came from Malaysia 35 years ago)*

These participants viewed Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism as Chinese religions although these religions also develop in other cultures. There is a common perception that it is 'normal' for a Chinese person to follow any of these religions. And compared with the Chinese who have other religions, these people are considered by the 'community' as very 'Chinese'. Since many informants are not religious, this perceived 'Chinese' feature was not widely brought up by participants as a marker of Chineseness. However, as discussed in the common notion of Chineseness such as ancestor worship, family bonds and respect for seniors, Confucianism shapes the definition of Chineseness. Among these 'Chinese' religions, Buddhism was most often mentioned. It may be because, compared with the other two, this religion is most well-known in Britain. According to Buddhist participants Lilly and Sophie, Buddhists follow some dietary practices in the family such as not having meat or fish in certain days. Such practices keep family members closer to the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary.

Many informants suggested that maintaining their Chinese identity does not necessarily require them to follow a Chinese religion; but being a Christian particularly weakens their sense of being Chinese. As Sally observed a phenomenon among the Chinese:

*People don't want to become Christian because they won't be able to follow the custom of ancestor worship otherwise. (Sally Yang- student, came from China 7 years ago, Christian)*

Chapter 4 discussed that the custom of ancestor worship is a common feature of the imagined Chinese community. Sally's quote revealed that because Christians do not follow this custom, Christian Chinese like her are voluntarily or involuntarily positioned towards the 'western' end of the ethnic boundary. Zolberg and Long (1999) note that European identity remains deeply embedded in Christian tradition. Despite declining numbers in Britain (ONS, 2011), many participants, both Christians and non-Christians, perceived Christianity as a major part of British culture. So they considered that Christianity facilitates the adoption of mainstream identity.

Among the participants, Sally and Sarah are very religious. Although I recruited them through different channels, they have a similar background in a way that they both came from China and converted to Christianity in London. In these two interviews, both participants spoke at length about their religion. Being a Christian is a very important part of their experience of being Chinese in London. So to some extent their religious identity is more salient and their boundary of 'ethnic identity' becomes faded.

Another recent migrant participant, Ching used to have '*a minor thought*' of changing his religion from Buddhist to Christianity when he first arrived. As Ching explained, the church supports migrants with useful resources such as free English classes and interpretation, enabling them to adapt to the new society. He also suggested that since a large number of Chinese in the church are established migrants who '*have their social networks*':

*If you are looking for a job, through building up relationship with them, you can get a lot of benefits. (Ching Tse- Buddhist, came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

Ching was frank about his motivation for converting to Christianity which Christian participants tended to be implicit about. This motivation was however not uncommon among the recent migrants as I observed from participating in church services. Ching argued that becoming a Christian could be used by recent migrants to access mainstream resources, through established migrants who already fit in well in the society. Ching and a few others also suggested that Christian churches could provide a feeling of home which sustains people's belonging in this country. So as a Buddhist, Ching felt that his religion moved him away from the resourceful Chinese, away from

claiming mainstream identity. This positioning shaped by religion adds another layer to Ching's 'dance' of Chineseness which is largely influenced by his sexuality.

'Chinese' religions and Christianity are therefore perceived by the participants to encourage individuals to claim Chinese and majority identities respectively. This division does not take into account that Christianity actually has a long history in China, so this 'western' religion has been a part of the 'eastern' society. The connection between identification and religion can become more complicated when more religions are involved, and Amanda's story can illustrate this.

Amanda is a Christian. She converted to Christianity in her teenage years, right after coming to the UK sixteen years ago. Being a Christian, Amanda suggested:

*There is social pressure because people think Christianity is western religion. You might be alienated by your fellows. Perhaps it will be more natural and commonly accepted if you are a Buddhist. (Amanda Xiao)*

Amanda sees herself becoming a 'westerner' because of her religion. She revealed a sense of anxiety as she moves away from her Chinese peers who are all assumed by her as non-Christians. The social burdens in the 'dance' at the boundary appear.

Amanda is now in her 30s and married to a Mediterranean man who grew up in a Muslim environment. She said:

*For my husband, it is a mix-up of the national culture and Islam religion. As the husband, he would like to see his wife, same as a Chinese wife, be more submissive towards the husband's family. (Amanda Xiao)*

The 'other' religion involved in Amanda's life relates not just to Christianity but also Islam. Being a Christian and being a Muslim's wife both shape her identity. While Amanda moves away from other Chinese as a Christian, she moves towards the Chinese as the wife of a Muslim. This is because the couple consider Islam and Chinese traditions are similar in terms of the expectation of a wife's role. Amanda's boundary of identity therefore involves Chinese, British and Mediterranean identities. She shifts her cultural belongingness among these, largely shaped by her religion, and indeed gender and mixed partnering as well. The identification in the social contexts of sexuality, gender and partnering will be discussed next.

### **5.3.3 Sexuality, gender and partnering**

With regard to sexuality, the respondents noted that heterosexual relationship is viewed as 'normal' while a homosexual relationship is considered a stigma for the Chinese. This perception may exist in many cultures, but the participants tended to view it as a Chinese norm in contrast to how it is viewed within the majority culture. BBC Hou mentioned this norm when he said:

*Chinese culture does not accept gay people at all. I think in western culture, it is more accepted. (Hou Chan- BBC)*

Hou and some other participants argued that Chinese people relate gay culture to western identity. So if a Chinese person is gay, these participants consider the person as a westerner and place him far away from the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary. BBC Lee spoke of his cousin who cannot be accepted by the father because he is gay. So being gay does not just lead to marginalisation, racism and homophobia as observed in Hibbins's (2005) research. Beyond that, my participants suggested that it also represents a state of exclusion from the imagined Chinese 'community'.

Participant Ching is another 'westerner' who has moved away from the Chinese:

*In Asian countries, it is already a crime to be gay. ... In this country, to be honest, you may not be necessarily happy but you live free. You would feel you are protected by law. (Ching Tse- came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

Ching sees himself as a gay man who committed 'a crime' in Chinese culture and escaped to this 'free' western society. He places himself and is placed by 'other' Chinese at the 'western' end of the ethnic boundary. Ching perceives that a most notable part of the majority culture is that it offers plenty of 'freedom and openness' for gay people to express their sexuality. Attaching a belonging to the host society satisfies various needs for him as a gay man. However, Ching suggests that he is not necessarily happy although he is free, which implies a sense of disconnection and rupture during boundary blurring.

In addition to sexuality, many informants claimed that gender difference exists in Chinese identification. In terms of following cultural rules, a norm suggested by many male and female participants is that women have to follow the rules while men do not always have to. When identification relates to maintaining the 'racial' features of being Chinese, some argued that men need to make sure of this through partnering within the Chinese (intra-ethnic partnering) whereas women are less expected to do so. This is

emphasized by all British Born male participants and a few others. As noted by Muttarak (2004), BBCs intermarry at a much higher rate than the established or recent migrants. So facing the higher possibility of mixed marriage and partnering, BBC males seem to become more aware of this gender expectation towards them.

To explain women's responsibility of maintaining cultural traditions, many informants suggested that the norms of respecting seniors, having Chinese food, worshiping ancestors and celebrating festivals are more important for women to follow:

*I have to be a good Chinese girl. Yeah, respectful, that's a massive thing, isn't it? (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

*My mum prays every day, she prays to our ancestors. (Sophie Chow)*

*My mum always cooks Chinese food. (Rachael Wong- came from Belgium 4.5 years ago)*

*My mum still makes efforts to celebrate Chinese New Year and Moon Festival whilst my dad won't make an effort at all. She gives us 'Lai see' (red packets) but my dad wouldn't. He gives us money but he won't put it in the red envelope. (Lee Sung- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

The participants suggested that women perform their 'dance' of Chineseness in relation to Chinese men, and they are required to stay at the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary. According to Sophie and a few other female participants, being respectful is not just a Chinese norm, but is a specific norm for Chinese women. Not following this rule as a woman would be viewed by the Chinese as 'madness' according to migrant participant Amanda. For the younger generation of Chinese women who have adopted western values, they would put themselves at risk of criticism from the Chinese if they do not move back to the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary. It shows that women are more strictly expected to retain and demonstrate respect for seniors and authority, and this expectation appears to sustain male dominated power relations.

It was discussed that the established migrants- the older generation of the family- have a strong sense of retaining culture. The gender expectation for women was therefore highlighted in the older generation. As observed by the participants, women from the older generation tend to lead on maintaining cultural rules in the family, while men have more freedom to deviate from expected norms. In Lee's family, for instance, Lee's mother makes efforts to retain Chinese rules even though she has been living here for over twenty years. Lee's father, on the other hand, has obtained some western values where a red packet no longer entails an important meaning. Lee's father positions



himself towards the majority end in the ambiguous zone and celebrates this Chinese festival in a less Chinese way.

Yuval-Davis (1997) suggests a double nature of women's membership where they are expected to follow specific rules. But, in addition to the specific rules for women, the Chinese participants pointed out a specific rule for men, which is intra-ethnic partnering. As BBC Hou described the importance of intra-ethnic partnering:

*There is importance there in terms of ... bloodline... what would the kid looks like, that kind of questions.*

*Assume if my parents' only son (me) marries someone who wasn't Chinese, I reckon they would be ... concerned about how my aunties and uncles in Hong Kong would think. (Hou Chan)*

Hou and a few others believed that partnering controls the bloodline and appearance of the next generation. It could be argued that the children of a mixed partnership would physically embody blurry boundaries, clearly breaking the fixed boundary of Chineseness. So these participants observed that Chinese families, especially those with unmarried children, are concerned about making sure that their child marries a Chinese person where the 'racial' identity of the family can be maintained. If a Chinese person has a non-Chinese partner, they place themselves or are placed by 'other' Chinese to be away from the Chinese end of the ethnic boundary. Since the 'racial' boundary of identity is considered by the participants as 'uncrossable', they suggested that mixed partnering challenges the 'racial' boundary and fundamentally weakens the family's Chineseness. Partnering was hence noted by the respondents as a crucial issue that influences people's identification. Hou also echoes here that the older generation might 'lose face' if their child or grandchild is with someone who is not Chinese. So apart from maintaining a sense of essence, partnering could concern the 'face' - pride and esteem – of the family.

The older generation's expectation towards the younger one reveals the interplay between individual backgrounds of partnering and generation in shaping the 'dance' of Chineseness. Partnering also intersects with religion which has been illustrated in Amanda's story. Partnering, furthermore, interacts with place of origin. So a couple can identify a difference between them based on their 'origin'. And as echoed by Rachael, the definition of a Chinese partner could be informed by place of origin.

More surprisingly, partnering could interplay with gender in shaping the participants' identification of Chineseness. This view was presented by Ying, Hou and Lee:

*The Chinese ... don't like mixing. If they have a son, they want their son to have a Chinese wife. (Ying Song- came from Hong Kong 16 years ago)*

*There is that kind of expectation for the males to marry a Chinese girl. ... I am expected to marry a Chinese girl because my father is the oldest of five and I am the only son of the oldest. ... They are used to expecting a Chinese girl to marry a non-Chinese boy. (Hou Chan- BBC, single)*

*When you see a mixed couple, it's usually ... a white man and a Chinese girl... not a Chinese guy and a white girl. (Lee Sung- BBC, in a relationship)*

These quotes imply that intra-ethnic partnering is a responsibility of the father and the son. Women, both the mother and the daughter, appear less important in carrying forward the 'racial' identity of the family. In this 'dance' between men and women, men are required to maintain Chineseness in a 'racial' way while women can become the 'others'. Hou also echoed a point that the eldest man in each generation has an even stronger duty to avoid mixed partnering.

The gendered attitude towards mixed partnering is in line with Hsu and Ip's (2006:72) research on the Taiwanese people in Australia, which suggests men have less flexibility in accepting mixed partnering. This gender difference arguably adds another understanding of the reason why Chinese men in Britain, in contrast to most other ethnic minority groups, have a lower rate of mixed partnering than women (Coleman, 1994; Luk, 2008; Muttarak, 2004; Platt, 2010).

In this perception of gender difference, women are perceived to be less influential in passing on the perceived 'racial' features of Chineseness. It does not take into account that women are in fact the biological reproducers of the ethnic group as research (e.g. Castles and Miller, 2009) has noted. Amanda echoed a point in her earlier statement that women are to some extent considered as the outsider of the family, because according to the culture they would belong to another family- the husband's- once they are married. And this view has also been noted in Hsu and Ip's (2006) study. Women's weaker duty might appear to contradict the 'double nature' of women's role in identification (Yuval-Davis, 1997:37), but it highlights their lower status in Chinese culture.

Although not culturally supported, mixed partnering is increasingly taking place for the Chinese. As established migrants Peter and Ying describe here:

*Chinese people marry the English, the French, Italians, Indians and Pakistanis. All mixed up and messy. (Ying Song- came from Hong Kong 16 years ago)*

*I have been here for so many years ... I even tried to date a 'ghost girl' ('gwei mui' in Cantonese, meaning a 'western girl'). (Peter Cheung- refugee, came from Vietnam 30 years ago)*

These established migrants observed that mixed partnering is increasingly accepted. Mixed partnering suggests a 'dance' of moving towards the 'other' end and considering the non-Chinese as 'us'. This positioning is justified by some participants as a way to adapt to the host society as Peter suggests. But taking into account that intra-ethnic partnering is still culturally preferable, Ying argued that boundary blurring through mixed partnering could create a 'messy' situation.

BBC Lee, for instance, has encountered such a situation. For over five years, he has been in a relationship with a girl who is white. Tensions occurred in the family as Lee has not followed what is expected of him as a Chinese man. However, harmonious family relations seem to be considered by the Chinese as important, and after deviating from the norm, people seek to make sense of their social world. So reacting to Lee's mixed relationship, Lee's family started to reposition and rethink their identity. And reflecting on the importance of bloodline was the first step.

As Ying also argued based on her observation of the Chinese around her:

*Today, bloodline is probably not vital anymore. (Ying Song)*

Ying suggested that the importance of bloodline becomes weakened as people face mixed partnering and this view was shared with a few other informants. Ying implied that Chinese identity overlaps with other identities through mixed partnering, and the overlapping zone may be increasingly enlarged as this phenomenon becomes more and more common. An ambiguous zone may develop to an extent that the distinction between identities appears to become of less significance, where maintaining the Chinese bloodline may be regarded by participants as less vital.

Mixed partnering not only changes the participants' perception of 'racial' identity, but also shapes their cultural practices. This can be illustrated by Lee's mixed relationship:

*I won't say we are overly British. ... We have to cook very very traditional Chinese food, or very very traditional British food. (Lee Sung)*

The mixed relationship seems to provide the couple a platform where they 'dance' back and forth across the ethnic boundary on a daily basis. So this couple are able to combine both British and Chinese cooking into their everyday lives without any apparent clash or discomfort.

For certain cultural elements, claiming dual identities may not be as easy for the couples and their families. Chapter 4 discussed that the participants perceive it as a Chinese norm for parents to help their children to buy a house, and this cultural difference is a stereotype. But in Lee's family, his parents and girlfriend happen to follow the stereotyped rules. The parents want to help the son while the girlfriend wants to buy a house by themselves. Both sides seem to be reluctant to change their perceptions, so tensions occur in the family. Lee suggested that a solution could be found when family members consider their ethnic identity as less important and make a decision according to a specific circumstance:

*I agree with both. I said to my parents that they need the money themselves; I also remind my girlfriend that my parents want to help. We will decide when we get to the point. (Lee Sung)*

For this family, following the cultural rules appears to be less possible and important. Lee implied that what they follow is a way to sustain family relations and in doing so pay less attention to ethnic differences. Lee also emphasized a class dimension in his relationship when he said:

*I don't think we have much distinct in culture. In some respects it's because her parents ... are very working class; and my parents because they own the take-away, they are very working class as well. (Lee Sung)*

Lee considers both his and his girlfriend's families to be working class. He suggests that ethnic identities are not significant in constructing their idea of who they are. Class instead becomes the key social identity in their relationship. I would argue that the ethnic boundary has become 'faded' into background as identities of class and family become salient. This boundary 'fading' and intersection of facets of identity fit with Edwards and colleagues' (2012) argument that mixedness puts the means of classifying difference under further scrutiny as multiple social identities act together in creating a sense of personhood.

Boundary 'fading' also takes place in Amanda's mixed relationship. She stated that a certain degree of commonality is shared between her and her husband especially in respect of family bonds. In a sense, family bonds are not used to indicate Chinese

specific cultural differences as both partners are closely linked to their families and to each others. Chineseness, mixed partnering and religion hence interplay and overlap to create and sustain a sense of personhood. The experiences of Lee and Amanda and observation of a few other respondents suggested that mixed partnering provides a frontier where different facets of identity are connected and where 'ethnic identities' could be rethought.

As we reach the end of this part - 'dancing' at the blurry boundary, it is worth noting that the key individual backgrounds- place of origin, generation of migration, religion, sexuality, gender and partnering- do intersect and overlap, although they have been discussed separately. These backgrounds tend to act together, shaping the multi-layered, shifting and dynamic negotiation of identity.

#### **5.4 Individual motivations of the 'dance'**

It has been discussed that the participants' identification of Chineseness involves both the assumption of a bright boundary of an 'imagined community' and the dynamic performance of identities at blurry boundaries. Individuals constantly shift their idea of who they are depending on different social contexts and different audiences. Attention is now drawn to the trend behind such dynamics in terms of what drives the negotiation of identity. Sophie's experience will lead us to explore this question.

In a restaurant, I met a girl in her late 20s dressed in western fashion. Sophie, one of the BBC participants, works in investment banking, holds a postgraduate degree, owns a flat, and speaks four different languages and dialects. Possessing a certain degree of social, economic and cultural capital, she could be considered a '*successful*' BBC (*Sophie Chow*). However, what struck me as our conversation proceeded was her mental struggle of '*I can never win*' in claiming Chinese and majority identities. This struggle mostly related to her relationships.

Sophie had a white boyfriend for three and a half years recently:

*The only reason why that ended was because he couldn't get his head around my culture. (Sophie Chow)*

She attributed her failure of that relationship to the common notion of Chineseness. Having assumed she was undoubtedly Chinese, she felt sure she was clearly different from her white boyfriend and she suggested because of that, they did not get along.

Sophie also used to have a BBC boyfriend:

*Because I am Malaysian Chinese, it makes slight difference comparing to being Hong Kong Chinese. ... The fact that I don't speak Cantonese as much as he did was a barrier as well. (Sophie Chow)*

According to this BBC woman who defines herself here as Malaysian Chinese, identity again created barriers in her relationship and led to its failure. Between the Chinese couple, neither their commonality of being Chinese nor that of being British born was significant enough to sustain their connection. Instead, the different place of origin of their parents became noticeable and distinguished the couple.

Sophie interpreted these two experiences in a way that she constructed homogeneous and heterogeneous notions of Chineseness both to create differences and barriers in her relationships. Sophie was aware that she can proclaim dual identities, but this is what struck me:

*I keep losing in all these situations. It looks like I can never win. How am I gonna end up? ... What's wrong with me? How do I balance ... the Western upbringing and the Eastern upbringing? (Sophie Chow)*

A blurry boundary which allows Sophie to claim dual identities without being forced to choose between the two feels 'wrong'. Sophie's negotiation of identity entails rupture where she feels the tensions of defining herself appropriately. Sophie's story may not be different to many young women of the same age and of different ethnicities, but it highlights how she constructs her idea of identity. It highlights the constraints in the process of boundary blurring. And furthermore, it makes us wonder what motivates individuals to construct their notion of their own identity from which they understand and interpret their social world.

The concepts of 'normality' (Goffman, 1972:49) and 'needs' (Maslow, 1973:370) can be applied in this analysis. Ching's story presented earlier has showcased how a desire for normality and psychological needs shape his shifting identification. In order to fulfil a sense of esteem and safety for being gay, Ching moved away from the Chinese and perceived Chinese people as 'them'. But the desires to make sense of his difference in the host society and to satisfy his need for financial safety and belonging required him to

construct an 'us' mentality with other Chinese. For many participants, the process of obtaining 'normality' in being Chinese is mostly driven by the needs for love and belonging. But some other needs, especially safety and esteem, are also involved in the identification.

The desires for 'safety' (Maslow, 1943:376) and 'normality' (Goffman, 1972:49) come together in shaping the participants' construction of Chineseness. In a sense they both satisfy a feeling of a comfortable, predictable and organized social situation. The perceived Chinese norm of being hard working, for instance, makes sense of Chinese people's 'activeness' in London society and is also a route for them to fulfil financial safety. In addition, converting to Christianity could be a strategy where recent migrant participants adapt to the new environment and obtain financial resources.

The urge to satisfy 'esteem' needs (Goffman, 1969:381) also encourages individuals to obtain a sense of normality for being Chinese. People may wish others to think highly of them (Goffman, 1969), and a high evaluation of themselves could help to achieve a sense of self-respect or gain esteem from others (Maslow, 1943). The common notion of Chineseness, in terms of language, respecting seniors, 'saving face', being hard working, chasing financial success and connection to China, not only makes sense of the participants' difference in UK society but also fulfils a sense of pride in being Chinese. In the individuals' 'dance', Rachael's repeated expression of 'sorry' highlighted her lack of confidence in her own Chineseness, and in a sense it explains the way she passionately tries to portray herself as a traditional Chinese person.

Another example can be seen from BBC Lap where his motivations of protecting his pride and feeling 'normal' around Chinese people position him away from other BBCs:

*Probably the reason why I stopped myself from going (to BBC meets) is from embarrassment; because I imagine everyone speaks Chinese and I am standing there, like a foreigner, like I am lost. (Lap Smith- parents came from Kenya)*

Lap can be considered as mixed heritage because one of his grandfathers is English, but he identifies himself as BBC and considers his Chineseness as important. However, when he performs his 'dance' to the BBCs, he finds himself moving away from them because he has a low level of confidence in Cantonese and he assumes other BBCs all speak it well. Imagining himself going to typical BBC social gatherings (BBC meets), Lap sees himself as a 'foreigner' in an environment which he perceives to be distinctively Chinese, although those BBCs may not necessarily feel the same way. According to

Goffman (1972), when embarrassment is predicted, such as Lap's low confidence in language, the individual would distance himself to reassert a sense of normality. In order to protect self-esteem and feel 'normal', Lap stops himself from getting in touch with the Chinese including other BBCs who could otherwise share a similar background with him. Driven by these motivations, Lap's positioning illustrates another layer of the 'dance' between the Chinese.

In Maslow's (1943) theory, self-actualization is a need at the highest level where the actualization of full personal potential takes place. To reach a certain degree of self-actualization, self-reflection is needed to facilitate the development, and the participants have shared their reflections. Being a gay man, Ching finds 'face saving' restrictive as he tries to claim both Chinese identity and gay status which is stigmatizing in the 'community'. He then realizes 'face' *'is actually not important'* so he puts less pressure on himself when he admits his gay status in front of Chinese people. Learning about *'healthy diet'*, Amanda decides to have soup before the main meal which is opposite to the Chinese norm. Lee sees ethnic identity less important while he maintains harmonious family relations. Self-reflection hence allows people to review their construction of identity and make a thoughtful and logical choice.

If more rules were rethought, one might question whether using chopsticks or a spoon is really important to distinguish Chineseness from the other cultures. One might realize it is a pity that Lee's uncle could not accept his son as gay only to 'save face' (*Lee Sung*). One might wonder what would happen if Sophie had perceived her Chinese identity less important in her relationship with the white boyfriend or the common points with the BBC partner.

However, as Goffman (1972:241) argues, the rules of our social world tend to be 'taken-for-granted'. Maslow (1943) also notes that the needs tend to drive an individual action unconsciously more often than consciously. So as echoed by Lilly:

*You just follow the rules naturally. (Lilly Hoang- 30s, came from Vietnam at the age of one)*

Lilly suggested that the notions of identities are set to be followed '*naturally*', not to be challenged and reflected. We often use easily available information to define our social world, and we less often reflect and seek more information which might be omitted in the easily available information. The rules of Chineseness are therefore taken for granted without many questions of why they should be followed and what would happen if they



were not followed. Since the construction of identity dominantly concerns the needs for safety, love and esteem, according to Maslow (1943), the needs at a higher level - self-actualization - becomes less important and noticeable for individuals to satisfy. Because of this, individuals may less often re-evaluate these rules which are taken-for-granted.

### **5.5 Summary**

This chapter has argued that although people tend to hold on to the common notion that all Chinese share a bright boundary, their experience of being Chinese in London reveals a blurry boundary where Chinese and majority identities overlap. As the participants interpret and perform the shared notion of Chineseness particularly in terms of language, food and seeking financial success, they 'dance' in an overlapping zone. They place themselves and are placed by the non-Chinese and 'other' Chinese in a location of the zone, depending on a social context and specific audiences. Individuals sometimes claim a Chinese identity and sometimes a majority identity and their location constantly shifts.

The participants' dynamic identification is influenced by individual backgrounds, which include place of origin, generation of migration, religion, sexuality, gender and partnering. Religion and place of origin also influence the construction of the imagined Chinese 'community' in a way that Confucianism informs various cultural norms and place of origin complicates the connection with China. Although the identifications informed by the key individual backgrounds were presented into sections, these backgrounds interplay with each other and shape a complex 'dance' of Chineseness. It demonstrates the multi-layered, shifting and dynamic construction of identity argued by Yuval-Davis (2003) in her macro level research. The 'dance' is mostly driven by the desires for normality, safety, love and esteem, as well as some degree of self-reflection and self-actualization. It is worth pointing out that dynamic identification is also influenced by social organisations which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The heterogeneity of the Chinese is highlighted in this chapter. This relates to the sub-grouping of the Chinese and the more complicated and individual experience of identification. Such heterogeneity can be showcased from some individual cases, such as recent migrants- Rachael from Belgium and Ching from Malaysia, established migrants- Fat from Hong Kong and Amanda from China, as well as BBCs- Lee with a white girlfriend and Sophie who had relationships with Chinese and non-Chinese people.

A large extent of commonality is shared within each sub-group, but members of a sub-group also differ from each other. So recent migrants Rachael and Ching differ by trying to become more 'Chinese' or less 'Chinese' after migration, established migrants Fat and Amanda show differences by working with Chinese and non-Chinese respectively, and BBCs Lee and Sophie construct their identity differently in their experience of partnering. It is also interesting to see how members from different sub-groups share their common points, such as the mixed relationships of established migrant Amanda and BBC Lee. Therefore, it can be suggested that although people hold on to the myth that all Chinese share the same notion of Chineseness, the negotiation of identity is so dynamic that it varies from person to person.

I would like to stress three points. Firstly, a common feature of the participants' performance of identity is a state of boundary blurring where multiple identities overlap and individuals constantly move between cultures. Secondly, this identification at the blurry boundary entails constraints. Sophie, Hou, Lap and many others' stories suggest that tensions could occur as they negotiate their idea of who they are among multiple identities. It questions Alba's (2005) macro level research which states that rupture does not occur at a blurry boundary. Finally, although ethnic identity is an aspect of personhood from which people cannot escape entirely (Eriksen, 2002), it is not always the highest priority. Setting Chinese identity as the topic of this research inevitably puts this subject into the centre of the participants' concern. I suggested that 'ethnic identity' could sometimes become less important and noticeable. And in addition to Zolberg and Long's (1999) categorization of boundary crossing, blurring and shifting, I have proposed a form 'boundary fading' to capture the identification of having 'ethnic identity' fading into background. So the participants' 'dance' of Chineseness is developed from the notion of an 'imagined community' to the dynamic negotiation of identity, from the identification influenced by one individual background to another, and from the focus of 'ethnic identity' to another perspective of personhood. From the 'dance' of Chineseness and the 'dance' of personhood, the dancer is performed and presents themselves through different dances to different audiences.

This chapter has questioned the shared notion of Chineseness in terms of the group boundary. As we come to the end of this analysis, we will move to the other common notion which suggests that all Chinese share the orientation to the home China. This fixed connection to one home will be examined in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: 'Dancing' between Homes

### 6.1 Introduction

The last chapter illustrated the 'dance' at the blurry boundary of Chineseness, illustrating the participants' shifting movements between cultures. This chapter will continue to deconstruct the shared notion of Chinese identity by exploring the individuals' belonging to places and the construction of home (referred to as 'homemaking' in this thesis).

This chapter will start with demonstrating multiple scales of home at national and local levels, illustrating that home for the participants is not just China. It will then move on to discuss how individuals negotiate belongingness among these multiple homes, focusing on connectedness and fluidity in the 'homemaking' process. Lastly, it will address the role of social organisations in shaping how they identify.

### 6.2 Multiple homes

*'It's a massive challenge- what is home'?* Participant Lap Smith asked himself during the interview. Lap's construction of home is a good point to begin our analysis as it clearly showcases the 'dance' between homes.

Lap was born in London, but both parents were born in Africa. His mother is Chinese and father is half Chinese half English. Before the interview, I asked Lap to complete a demographic questionnaire which requested information on the family's 'place of origin'. Drawing attention to his answer - 'Mainland China', I (Xia) asked:

*Xia: Is this the place of origin of your parents?*

*Lap: Okay.*

*Xia: Mainland China?*

*Lap: Canton. No?*

*...*

*Lap: Why did you think? You think I would write Hong Kong?*

*...*

*Lap: I mean, by ethnic origin I am Cantonese; my parents are Cantonese but my parents were born in Kenya. So what do you want me to put then?*

Initially, Lap did not expect me to ask him the question about their 'place of origin'. When I raised that question, he simply responded with an 'okay' to confirm his answer

'Mainland China'. As Lap started to perform his 'dance' to me, he seemed to place himself closer to me at the ethnic boundary as we appeared to be both 'from China'. However, through the discussion, 'place of origin' became a concept in question. Underpinned by a fixed orientation to the ancestral home China, Lap's multiple homes emerged. China, Canton, Hong Kong and Kenya all seemed to be his possible 'origins'. Lap 'moved' himself back and forth among these places, negotiating a sense of where home is. This 'dance' between multiple homes revealed a notion that each place is a home but not really a home, a combination and interplay of belongingness and 'homelessness' (Berger, 1984:64).

With regard to China, Lap said:

*I want to go to China ... maybe I will have a better idea of who I am, where I come from ... to make this connection again. (Lap Smith)*

Orientation to China makes sense of Lap's 'racial' difference in the UK and his belonging to the imagined Chinese 'community'. Although some scholars (e.g. Fortier, 2000) suggest that lived experience and remembrances are important for sustaining an idea of home, others (e.g. Somerville, 1992) also notes that home is a matter of cognition and intellectual construction so people may have a sense of home even though they have no experience or memory of it. This is surely the case for Lap who has never visited China. China is a 'racial' home which is symbolically constructed by him based on an assumed notion of Chineseness. But again, since this connection is built without lived experience in China, Lap feels the weakness in this link and has low confidence about his Chinese identity. He hence tries his best to learn about China by reading books which often relate to '*history, military, food and religion*' as Lap suggested.

*My home is here and I can tell you the address. (Lap Smith)*

Lap also identifies his current house in London as his home. He constructs this home by symbolic meanings developed from the bonds of his nuclear family and material representation of the building. In a sense, where his parents are simply makes the building a home. This local home provides Lap with physiological satisfaction, safety and family love.

Apart from China and the house in London, Lap also places himself in another home, Africa:

*In terms of immediate family, my generation, my parents' generation, their heart is in Africa because, in most recent memory and family business, everything happened there. (Lap Smith)*

Africa is Lap's home where the heart of the family lies. By Africa, Lap referred to Kenya where many of his extended family members live. It was suggested in Chapter 4 that the participants' definition of family includes not just nuclear family but also the extended one. As Africa strongly relates to Lap's extended family, he identifies it as his home. So the home where Lap's family are supposed to return to either physically or spiritually is Africa, and is no longer the village of origin in China - the traditional Chinese idea of home (Wang and Wong, 2007). When Lap's grandmother passed away, she was taken 'back' to Africa for a funeral:

*It was really weird- I am a British born and bred Chinese, in Africa holding a funeral, and this Chinese Buddhist came along. To me it was a clash of so many cultures but the feeling was distinctively Chinese. (Lap Smith)*

It seems the ideas of national and continental homes in Africa are sustained by a local sense of belonging to the family home. Lap also recognizes the fact that he was born and bred in Britain and he still holds on to a sense of Chinese 'community' that associates him with China. So a family occasion, the funeral which took place in a locality in Africa put together various homes including the continental, national and local homes in Africa, home in Britain and the ancestral home China.

Lap recalled that he sensed a 'distinctive' feeling of Chineseness while witnessing 'a clash of so many cultures'. These contradictory but coexisting feelings echo a common experience of the participants that they hold on to a clear notion of an imagined Chinese community while interpreting and performing this notion in a complex way. Hence, Lap's family home in Africa reflects not just Chinese identity, but the overlaps between Chineseness, Africanness and westernness.

This is how Lap described the Chinese identity in his home in Africa:

*There's a massive Chinese culture out there. ... (When) you close the door, you are not in Africa anymore: the food ... everyone speaking Chinese, all the old people walking around. (Lap Smith)*

Lap observed that Chinese identity such as food, language, the authority of seniors and family bonds are actively practised in family and community homes in Africa. He implied that these Chinese rules make sense of Chinese people's cultural difference in the host society and an idea that Africa is their home. For Lap who follows a very 'western'

lifestyle in London and has never been to China, this home provides an essential source of cultural identity making sense of Lap's belonging to Chinese culture.

In Africa, Chinese people also proclaim an African identity as Lap suggested:

*The Chinese do lots of business all over Africa ... walking amongst the local Africans as confidently as they were local. ... Africans do not usually do things according to the books. The Chinese doing business there ask fewer questions and push people around less, so they integrate easily.*

*A Chinese guy can wear an African T-shirt like he is African. (Lap Smith)*

Lap observed that in order to do businesses in Africa, the Chinese adopt a perceived African mentality. Chapter 5 discussed a common view of the participants that financial success encourages the Chinese to adopt mainstream identity in Britain. And based on his experience, Lap argued that a similar trend happens to the Chinese in Africa. He suggested that the adaptation in a business environment then extends to the other aspects of social life such as speaking a 'local language' and wearing 'an African T-shirt'.

Lap continued by illustrating that the Chinese in Africa are not just 'Chinese' and 'African', but are also 'Western':

*For my cousins in Africa ... They are African born and bred but they are not African by blood, obviously, obviously. So obviously they went to British schools in Africa.*

*They have a Western mentality, because they go to western schools. But remember at the same time, western lifestyle is very popular. They see movies; they like the fashion, fast food, crisps; all that kind of things are very Western. (Lap Smith)*

Home in Africa is considered by Lap to entail many aspects of western culture. He echoes a common perception of the participants that to be western is to be privileged. So according to Lap, not being African by 'blood' makes it easier for the Chinese to obtain this privileged identity. He suggested that the Chinese follow western rules which are defined in terms of entertainment, dress and food; and this adoption implies a sense of detachment from Africa for the Chinese.

Lap therefore 'dances' between homes in China, Britain and Kenya. Based on Wang and Wong's (2007) categorization of home, China is Lap's ancestral home, Britain is the functional home and Kenya is the emotional home. Belonging to a country can be further defined into local and national homes. Lap places himself among these places, performing a complex 'dance' between homes.

In the following sections, I will illustrate the participants' construction of home at both national and local levels. I will explore how 'racial' belonging, cultural identity or citizenship is symbolically and materially constructed in relation to a space. A 'racial' construction of home will be studied in terms of the symbolic representation of racial belonging. A cultural home will be unpacked through the symbolic construction of cultural identity and the material representations of a building and property ownership. A home in relation to citizenship will be analyzed in terms of the symbols of civil and political rights and the material representation of passport. Since the construction of home largely involves negotiating the boundary of ethnic identity, and vice versa, the connection between boundary and home will then be discussed.

### **6.2.1 National homes**

The participants attach their belonging to more than one country. These national homes include China, Hong Kong, another overseas country and Britain.

A claim made by most respondents was their 'racial' belonging exclusively attached to China. As discussed in Lap's story, China is their ancestral home, creating roots for the participants. As Wang and Wong (2007) argue, rootedness is essential for Chineseness. This idea of home makes sense of the common notion of a Chinese 'community' and the assumed homogeneity of the Chinese. In light of China's emerging power in the world (Pieke et al., 2004), the participants believed that this home delivers a meaning of prosperity. Regardless of whether they have visited China, many of them suggested that they increasingly take pride in Chinese identity due to China's development. And this was echoed by established migrant Ying:

*China is stronger and stronger ... You have China as the country backing you up.  
(Ying Song)*

Ying lived in Hong Kong till her late 30s, and sixteen years ago she migrated to the UK. Ying's parents were born in China but she has only visited China twice. Although she has limited lived experiences there, the idea that China is her home strengthens the confidence and pride in being Chinese. This identification is in line with her notion of homogeneous Chineseness that all Chinese, including herself, are clearly different from other groups in Britain.

As presented in Lap's story, China can be constructed without any firsthand experience of the place. So, low confidence in Chineseness has been expressed by some respondents who have not visited China. In order to gain a 'renewed pride in their identity', the diaspora usually seek to strengthen the connection with the ancestral home (Sarup, 1996:3). Driven by a desire for self-esteem, these participants tend to search for the roots by collecting information on China and visiting the country.

For many participants, China is only an ancestral home that sustains a 'racial' identification of Chineseness, and China does not give them cultural belonging or citizenship. The common notion of Chineseness as a shared orientation to China starts to be complicated. As Ying continued to explain her connection to China:

*If I successfully do something that you cannot do ... I may feel proud. But now the Chinese state is doing well, not me. I don't take pride in that. (Ying Song)*

Ying claimed that she did not take pride in the Chinese state and she distanced herself from it. Ying does not attach a belonging to China in relation to citizenship and I learned this from my interaction with her during the interview (discussed in Chapter 3). Her detachment from China as a non-Chinese citizen was different from me, a Chinese citizen. Ying also detaches cultural belonging to China as she does not see herself familiar with the way of life in China. The detachment of cultural belonging echoed by Ying questions Ong and Nonini's (2004:9) contention that China is 'primal source and centre, the *Middle Kingdom*, *fons et origo* of "Chinese culture"'. Many participants' experience suggests that China may not be the only centre of 'Chinese culture', but the source of a Chinese 'racial' belonging.

The participants who are Chinese citizens often claim their cultural belonging and citizenship in relation to China. For those people, China is a home because they have a Chinese passport, and this material representation is common for the construction of any home that is related to citizenship. Those Chinese citizens also spoke of a cultural belonging. Sarah, for instance, suggested that '*I have my parents there and that is a place where I grew up*'. This student from China has firsthand experience of growing up in China surrounded with cultural values and norms, where she attaches a cultural belonging to the country. So for Sarah, China is not just an ancestral home; it also entails affectionate social relations and a sense of emotional security which can be defined as what Wang and Wong (2007) call as an emotional home. Sarah's experience provides an example of multiple meanings attached to one place. It suggests that a



static distinction of the meanings of home (e.g. Wang and Wong, 2007; Somerville, 1992) may not be effective in capturing the complex negotiation of home.

Apart from China, Hong Kong is another notable home of the participants. For those first generation Hong Kong migrants, Hong Kong is usually their place of birth. The Hong Kong migrants in this study mostly migrated when Hong Kong was Britain's colonial territory, so I define Hong Kong as a 'national' home. Ying again firmly stated that:

*My home is in Hong Kong, as always. ... I am here for one or two decades and will then go back there. This is life of a sojourner. (Ying Song)*

Although in Britain for nearly two decades, Ying asserted that her home is not in Britain but in Hong Kong. Her detachment of belonging to Britain may be because this woman in her 50s does not have any family or own a house here. As she explained, '*my family are still there*' in Hong Kong. She echoed a common perception that where the family is makes the place a home. She maintains such a connection through weekly phone calls and yearly visits so her strong family bonds sustain the idea of home. In addition, Ying installed a Hong Kong TV channel so her connection to this overseas home is constantly updated. Ying's connection to Hong Kong through Hong Kong TV or radio channel is shared by some other Hong Kong migrants, although some may also make their home in Britain.

The previous chapter argued that Hong Kong, Mainland China and Britain are the notable 'places of origin' of Chinese sub-groups. Hong Kong is the origin of many established migrants who are perceived by the participants as being able to access more mainstream resources than recent migrants. Hong Kong is therefore an overseas home identified by most established migrant participants, a home that gives them pride.

Quite a few BBCs are descendants of Hong Kong migrants and they also perceive Hong Kong as a home. Unlike the older generations who have lived there, the younger generation might have only visited Hong Kong for holidays. Without sufficient firsthand experiences, their construction of home seems largely based on memories of the social environment from those visits. This in a sense creates a strong feeling of '*home but not really home*' (Rachael Wong). BBC Pat, for instance, claimed that the language in Hong Kong creates a sense of familiarity and a feeling of home, while the smell and taste of food generate a sense of unfamiliarity. Some other BBCs also think that the environment in Hong Kong is strange, because '*you can't even step on grass*' (Lee Sung), '*it's too crowded*' and people are '*rude*' (Rachael Wong). Certain values and norms are

perceived as not 'normal' for these BBCs, who claim a 'western' identity apart from Chineseness and have limited lived experiences to make a strong sense of belonging. Their multiple identities therefore make sense of their attachment to and detachment from Hong Kong. In fact, not only BBCs but also other participants tend to have multiple identities, so a feeling of 'home but not really home' in relation to a space is to some extent shared among the participants.

Some participants of this study were born in an overseas country other than China and Hong Kong. Rachael, for instance, was born in Belgium and she suggested that Belgium is her home in relation to cultural belonging and citizenship:

*My parents are there and I have worked there. At the end of the day, I still have a Belgian passport.*

*When I go home, it's so warm to hear my language- my Flemish. (Rachael Wong)*

'Her' Flemish – a main language in Belgium- makes sense of Rachael's idea that Belgium is her cultural home and the language creates a sense of familiarity sustaining a feeling of warmth. Rachael told me that Belgium is not just a cultural home, but also a home that relates to her citizenship and is identified by a passport.

The fact that Rachael's cultural practices make sense of a belonging to an overseas home reminds us of Lap's experience in Kenya. Both respondents attach a cultural belonging to an overseas country along with the negotiation of multiple identities. Nevertheless, these two are different in terms of which identity is used to make sense of the idea of home. For Rachael who has lived in Belgium for over twenty years, a Belgian identity makes sense of her idea of home. For BBC Lap who finds it difficult to claim his Chinese identity in Britain and only visits Kenya for short holidays, the Chinese customs in Kenya become essential in allowing him to make sense of Chinese identity and to make a home in Kenya.

I should note that most participants whose experiences have been shared above have pleasant memories of the overseas country that they call a home. For those however who had unpleasant political encounters, their belonging to that country was more complicated. Peter is a refugee who came from Vietnam thirty years ago and this is how he viewed the country:

*I went to Vietnam the year before ... and I only have Vietnamese TV channel since last year. Until then, my connection with Vietnam was fading away and I could hardly tell if there was any.*

*When I went to Vietnam, it struck me somehow. But I didn't have any feelings of being at home. (Peter Cheung)*

Peter implied that somehow he feels a connection with Vietnam and it encouraged him to visit the country and install a Vietnamese TV channel in his house. However, the experience of forced migration created an unpleasant memory for Peter, which carries 'a *feeling of hatred*' and sustains the idea that Vietnam is not his home. During the war between China and Vietnam in the 1970s, the Vietnamese government forced many Chinese people like Peter to leave. Since then, Peter lost his sense of security, belonging and pride in relation to that country. It seems this detachment of belonging has not changed ever since even though the political agenda in Vietnam has changed. Peter's experience echoes the political nature of 'homemaking' process which will be discussed later.

Above we have discussed the participants' attachment and detachment of belonging to a country overseas. With regard to Britain, those who are British citizens suggested that Britain is a home, and they often highlighted their political and civil rights associated with the country as Peter and Lee demonstrate here:

*If something happens to me ... the government that rescues and accepts me should be the British. (Peter Cheung- refugee, came from Vietnam 30 years ago)*

*In terms of national support, it is always gonna be Britain that supports me. (Lee Sung- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

The informants suggested that Britain is the political shelter that secures their civil and political rights and provides a sense of safety. Compared with citizens of an overseas country who often expressed a sense of pride or loyalty to their state of citizenship, those British citizens often stressed their rights in this country. It might be because people are more concerned about their rights in a country when they are inside the territory, and their pride and loyalty to their state of citizenship become stronger when they are away.

Among those who are overseas citizens, none identified Britain as their home and in fact, some of them explicitly stated that Britain is not their home. Their belonging to this country is largely restricted due to their legal status. So they often feel physically and mentally insecure in this society.

Sally, a student in her 20s who came from China seven years ago, was harassed in London where she felt physically unsafe. In public places, she was threatened by a '*non-Chinese*' stranger hitting her bag strongly and asking her to '*go back China*'. She was mildly hit by '*English*' girls who were about ten years younger than her. On a bus, she and her friend were spat on by a '*non-white*' person. Sally explained that these unpleasant encounters were because '*I am not British*'. Not being a UK citizen, she puts herself away from the mainstream and assumes all non-Chinese are more privileged than her. The insecure immigration status was used by Sally to make sense of her experiences and her feeling of not being at home in Britain.

Feelings of physical insecurity like Sally's were not commonly reported by the participants, but what was commonly claimed by the overseas citizens was a sense of mental insecurity and instability. Ching from Malaysia repeated this shared view when he said:

*It's not possible to see it as a home ... because you don't have a place to be attached to. ... If I don't get a visa or if I change work, I will need to move. (came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

Ching was on a student visa although he committed a lot of time to working. He considered that because his immigration status was '*uncertain*', he did not have civil and political rights in Britain, especially the right to freely enter and leave the country. Ching worked in Chinese catering services where he often changed his workplace and accommodation, and he attributed this lifestyle to his insecure immigration status. The detachment of national belonging in a sense restricted his belonging to a locality, so he did not see where he lived as a home. Ching's experience echoes that the UK state plays an important role in the participants' attachment or detachment to British citizenship. Since these people have differing ideas of where their home is in relation to citizenship, they noticed difference from other Chinese people.

### **6.2.2 Local homes**

Unlike national belonging which could be influenced by political factors, local belonging tends to be constructed around everyday life. The participants attach belongings to local places overseas and in Britain, which mainly involve a house of their family, London, and a Chinese community organisation, a Chinese church and Chinatown in London.

With regard to a local home overseas, the house of family members was often identified by the participants. Some informants said this is a place where they visit the family and

'get spoilt' (Sophie Chow). Such a construction of home again reflects the participants' shared view that where home is where the family members are. Family love retains the most stable feeling of having a home overseas. For migrants such as Ying and Sarah, the house where their parents and siblings are is their home. For BBCs who might feel unfamiliar when they visit the parents' country of origin, a strong sense of belonging is often attached to this local home. This was echoed by BBC Hou:

*My grandfather's home in Hong Kong ... is my secondary home. My father and four uncles... built the house. ... This is the real tangible result of my family's work.*  
(Hou Chan)

Hou suggested that this local home overseas is defined by the building, the practice of family members building it together and a sense of family love. The family bonds embedded in this place in a sense become a way where Hou constructs his notion of homogeneous Chineseness. Hou's 'homemaking' in the house in Hong Kong is shared with another respondent Lap who practised Chinese customs and norms in the house in Africa. In a way, the participants' belonging to their family house abroad is constructed along with the practice of Chinese culture.

Locating a local home in Britain, some respondents pointed out London as home. These respondents are mostly British citizens and they claimed a stronger sense of belonging to London than to Britain. BBC Sophie is one of them who suggested that:

*London... is naturally a home ... in terms of work and having bought a flat... and maybe having a future by getting married and having children.* (Sophie Chow-BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)

Compared with the national home Britain which could be related to political factors, Sophie explained that belonging to London is mostly grounded in ordinary life such as work, buying a flat, getting married and having children. Provided that she has a secure immigration status, she constructs an idea of home in relation to this city based on such ordinary life.

Unlike those British citizens, the overseas citizens rarely identified London as home. This detachment from local belonging is often because of feeling detached from belonging at national level- 'I am not British' (Sally Yang) and 'my legal status is not secure here' (Ching Tse). Intersections between national and local spaces will be explored in a later section.

The UK citizens, especially those in receipt of welfare benefits, also attach belonging to the borough of residency in London. This was strongly raised by the focus group participants when they said:

*In terms of local election, we vote in the borough where we live. (Man Lam- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

*If I want to apply for social housing or reduction for my rent, I won't be accepted here but I will be accepted in Croydon because I am the resident there. (Fat Tse- came from Hong Kong 45 years ago)*

Most focus group participants receive mean-tested welfare benefits and many of them live in social housing. Compared with individual interviewees many of whom have a privileged financial status, these established migrants emphasized a sense of belonging to their borough which was not commonly suggested by individual interviewees. They suggested that they exercise political rights and receive government support based on a local borough. And because of this, they are placed by majority society to a specific local home where citizenship is exercised.

These established migrants also place themselves in another local home, Chinese community organisations. It was mentioned in previous research that community organisations target established migrant elderly as a service group (Lam et al., 2009) and as such provide a home for them. Although each London borough may have a Chinese community organisation, the participants' connection to community centres is not restricted to their borough. As Ying who works at a community centre observed, these people may even commit themselves to more than one Chinese centre. Focus group participant Fat, for instance, goes to a community centre outside his borough. In the focus group, Chun, Peng and Lum spoke of attending daily or weekly activities in more than one organisation. They suggested that the community organisations are an expression of 'community' life. By claiming Chineseness in this space, these established migrant participants attach a cultural belonging to the place.

Many of these established migrants live in social housing and they don't seem to suggest a belonging attached to the house they live in. To compare, those participants who legally own their house often noted a sense of belonging to the house as emphasized by Lap, Sophie, Lilly and Amanda. The traditional view that the legal ownership of a property is a precondition of marriage and family security (Jin, 2010) may be changing in China, but appears to remain influential to these overseas Chinese. Many participants hence believe that it is crucial to legally own the house in order to call

that place a home. And as discussed in Chapter 5, helping children to buy a house becomes a main duty for parents to support their grown up children.

This cultural norm in a way suggests that the building in which the participants live their everyday life is not necessarily perceived as home. Living in rented accommodation, BBC Hou suggested that his residence in London is not a home and his home is in the parents' owned house in Surrey. Again, for the same reason, migrant participant Ying suggested that she does not have a home here:

*Even the place I live in is rented from others; even this is not mine. (Ying Song-came from Hong Kong 16 years ago)*

Ying seems to think that if she owned a property here, she could have a home in Britain. Her quote implies that not legally owning the house creates a feeling of insecurity and instability and not belonging in this country. For a few other interviewees such as Cali and Lee who live with their partners in rented accommodation, their sense of belonging to the house does not seem to be strong either.

Although the participants perceived legal ownership as crucial for making the house a home, a few of them suggested that, in rented accommodation, it is possible that affectionate relations could be built and create a degree of belonging. This was echoed by Sarah, a student from China who used to rent a house with two other Chinese people:

*They were very caring and full of love. Together we cooked, ate, did food shopping and put food into the fridge. (Sarah Chen)*

Sarah's quote vividly captured the everyday life in this home which seemed to be largely related to food. It was discussed in Chapter 4 that the Chinese are concerned about social relations around food. So according to Sarah, these everyday food-related practices created a family-like feeling. A sense of love compensated for the instability and insecurity due to the fact that she did not own the property. And it provided Sarah with a sense of emotional security in the place. This locality was therefore both functional and emotional homes according to Wang and Wong's (2007) definition. However, since those two people moved outside London, Sarah had to move out of that house as well. Currently Sarah rents another house with some other Chinese people, and Sarah thinks that people in that house have '*separate lives*'. So unlike the previous experience, Sarah now does not see the rented accommodation as her home.

Sarah told me in the interview that '*I don't feel at home here except when I go to church*'. This Christian girl's belonging in this country is now solely reliant on local belonging to a Chinese church:

*Coming to the church, it is not just that people care for you but also the whole atmosphere is peaceful, so you suddenly feel a sense of home. (Sarah Chen)*

Sarah believes that affectionate relations in the church create an atmosphere which brings feelings of acceptance, warmth and belonging. According to Sarah and some other Christians, it is such locally grounded social interaction that makes the place a home. The church creates family-like feelings between '*brothers and sisters*' (Amanda Xiao, Sarah Chen).

Chinese churches are often referred to as a home by recent migrant Christians. These participants may not feel they belong to the host society because of immigration status, and neither is their accommodation a home. So church may be the '*only home*' (Sally Yang) for them providing a sense of security in an unfamiliar environment and helping them to adapt to western culture. These recent migrants suggest that they may live far from their church or move around in the city but their orientation to the church tends to be retained. They obviously agree with Tweed (2006) who notes that religion provides a home for diaspora.

Compared with these recent migrants, some established migrants and BBCs in this study did not seem to express a strong feeling of home in relation to their church even if they attended church services regularly. BBC Pat even noted that he keeps a distance from people in the church although he goes there almost every week. So, this small sample seems to suggest that the idea that church is home is informed by individual migration background.

And compared with Christian churches, Buddhist temples did not appear to be referred to by the participants as home. It may be because Buddhists tend to exercise religious practices in the family, so Buddhism strengthens belonging to a family home rather than creating another home. Therefore, we could argue that religion shapes the construction of the notion of home, and based on individuals' religion, the Chinese participants differed from each other.



Finally, a local home in London which was widely shared among the participants is Chinatown. This locality is considered as a symbolic home which is often taken for granted. For these participants, being Chinese means Chinatown in London is home.

When I asked the focus group participants about where home is for the Chinese 'community', they instantly mentioned Chinatown. When BBC Lee described that he disobeys Chinese rules by partnering with a non-Chinese girl, he told me that people in Chinatown would see him differently. He appeared to perceive Chinatown as the centre of the 'community'. Some BBCs such as Hou and Pat considered Chinese food in Chinatown as authentic compared with any high street takeaways. Established migrant Ying saw Chinatown as the only public place where she could read and communicate in Chinese. So associated with cultural values and norms, Chinatown is constructed as a local home that sustains an idea of the imagined Chinese community. The participants may not always 'go home' and may not know other people in this home. And as argued elsewhere (Sales et al., 2009), the home can be constructed differently by different Chinese people, where heterogeneity of the Chinese surfaces. But as it makes sense of the participants' cultural difference in society, Chinatown is considered by them as a symbolic home of the 'community'.

### **6.2.3 Home and group boundary**

The narratives of the participants' 'homemaking' suggest that the construction of home is closely linked to boundary negotiation. For instance, the connections to China and Chinatown draw a fixed line between the Chinese and 'others', and sustain a notion of an imagined Chinese 'community'. Meanwhile, belonging to other homes is part of the negotiation of multiple identities. By exercising civil, political and social rights in Britain, those respondents who are British citizens claimed a majority identity; they moved to the British end of the ethnic boundary and moved away from the overseas citizens. By seeing Chinese community organisations as a home, established migrant participants (who are mostly from Hong Kong) moved away from Chinese people from Fujian and BBCs. By perceiving the church as a home, some recent migrants became distanced from Chinese Buddhists and many other Chinese.

The interplay between home and group boundary can be further demonstrated through the participants' negotiation of home in relation to an overseas place. According to the participants, the idea of whether a place overseas is a home is largely reliant on the negotiations of identity around language and food. Identification around language often

relates to sound of languages or dialects, and identification around food refers to the tastes, smell and eating utensils. The data suggest that these two elements of identification appear to function differently in creating or detaching a belonging.

Ching's experience in Malaysia provided an example of identification around language:

*The whole environment with Malaysians and Indians speaking different languages ... is close to me. (Ching Tse- came from Malaysia 6 years ago)*

Ching suggested that the multilingual environment in Malaysia creates a sense of being at home. He speaks some Malay and no Hindi. But regardless of his language proficiency, the sound of these languages creates a familiar feeling where he retains a cultural connection to the country. Ching's experience was shared with Rachael whose story of feeling warm in hearing 'her' Flemish in Belgium was discussed earlier. So according to some participants, the sound of languages in an overseas place creates and sustains a feeling of being at home.

BBC Pat has a similar view in relation to language in Hong Kong, but he argued that the food there makes him feel not at home:

*The interaction is in Chinese ... so I have more home feelings. ... But I am not used to the eating there. It's either not my taste or has too strong smell. I have been growing up in Britain, so in a way I feel Hong Kong is more of a tourist place instead of more for a home. (Pat Man- BBC man)*

According to Pat, the Chinese language which is used in everyday communication in Hong Kong creates a feeling of home. But for this British Born Chinese who only visits there for short holidays, Hong Kong is not really a home, and he suggested this is because of the food there. He is used to 'Chinese' food in Britain which he referred to as '*Chinese food in British style*', but he is not used to the food in Hong Kong. He explained that the taste and smell generate a feeling of unfamiliarity and therefore a sense of not being at home.

Such feelings of not being at home because of food were claimed by some other informants. Sarah from China echoed that food and eating in her country of origin is no longer always familiar. She did not refer to the taste and smell, but the eating utensils. As she said: '*when I went back and used chopsticks, I felt very uncomfortable; I said to my mum, could I use spoon please*'. While living abroad for more than four years, Sarah got used to some perceived western food cultures. So when back in her place of origin, western norms contradicted some Chinese rules and made her feel she does not belong.

Sarah, Pat, Rachael and Ching hence echoed an experience that while language sustains a feeling of being at home in an overseas country, food can create a feeling of not belonging. However, the encounter of Lap shows a different experience:

*In Africa, I can speak a few words of the local language. ...The African food is interesting ... but not what I want to have every day. I mean I like the food there is that ... some of the best Chinese food I have eaten is in Africa. (Lap Smith- BBC)*

For BBC Lap, the local language in Africa generates a feeling of home; and so does Chinese food, which is quite different from many others' experiences. Unlike others such as BBC Pat who follow certain Chinese rules in Britain, Lap cannot use Chinese to communicate and his lifestyle is rather 'westernized' according to him. Since he does not really find his Chinese identity in Britain, Chinese food in Africa becomes a crucial element that makes sense of his Chinese identity and therefore his orientation to the cultural home. Lap's experience adds another aspect of complex identification around home.

### **6.3 'Dancing' between homes**

Following the exploration of the participants' multiple homes, this section will demonstrate the individuals' negotiation of identity in relation to these places. It addresses how multiple homes add up to the broader notion of home and how it is negotiated and renegotiated.

The analysis starts with a discussion between the focus group participants as it illustrates the participants' negotiation of identity between places:

*Man Lam: We are British citizens but the British won't recognize us as their people.*

*Fat Tse: China doesn't count me as its people either because my passport doesn't state I am a Chinese citizen. ... I am hanging in the middle. I don't belong to China, neither to Britain.*

*Pan Chon: You belong to this borough.*

*Fat Tse: Yes, I belong to this borough.*

*Man Lam: You won't have a problem going back to Hong Kong. ... If serious racial discrimination does happen here, I think China will take you. Don't worry. China will take you.*

This quote provides an example of the focus group participants' 'dance' between homes. These established migrants who came from Hong Kong suggested that they attach a sense of belonging to Britain, China, Hong Kong and a London borough. They place

themselves in the British society based on the fact that they are British citizens, but they argued that 'the British' would place them outside the mainstream. Because they are not Chinese citizens, they do not think they can place themselves as part of the Chinese 'homeland', although they may be linked to China by their Chinese fellows based on a shared notion of 'racial' belonging. These participants therefore 'dance' between multiple homes, constantly placing themselves and being placed by majority society and other Chinese. They 'move' back and forth between these places, negotiating a sense of where home is and revealing a feeling of '*hanging in the middle*', an idea that a space can be a home but also not really be a home.

In this section, I will analyze the participants' 'dance' between homes, highlighting the connectedness and fluidity of 'homemaking' process. The connectedness of homes will be investigated in terms of transnationalism, translocality and beyond. The fluidity of homes will be studied specifically in relation to generational change in the orientation to family home and the changes taking place during migration and relocation.

### **6.3.1 Connecting homes**

The notion of home can entail national and local connections, national and national links, and local and local links. These connections involve spaces both overseas and in the UK.

The participants suggested that national and local spaces can influence each other. For instance, British citizens who attach a belonging to Britain find it easier to make a home in London. On the other hand, some recent migrant participants such as Ching do not see themselves belonging in this country, so they find it difficult to find a local home here. With regard to an overseas place, Peter does not have a local home in Vietnam because of the detachment of Vietnamese citizenship. Therefore, the attachment and detachment of a national belonging influences the belongingness to a locality. The data also demonstrate the national-local connection by suggesting that national belonging may be reliant on a local identity. As illustrated in Lap's story, his belonging to Kenya and Africa are sustained by local attachment to the family house in that country. And for those who are not British citizens, they tend to depend on a local belonging to make sense of their cultural connection to this country. To make this link, some Christian migrants find a home in their church and many others connect themselves to Chinatown.

Putting together national belongings, the individuals construct a transnational link and 'move' between countries. Their narratives suggest that 'racial' belonging to China often coexists with a sense of belonging to another country. As showcased in Lap's experience, 'racial' belonging to China sustained the notion of an imagined Chinese community, while underpinned by that, his cultural belonging is attached to Kenya and Britain is his home in terms of citizenship. According to the participants, citizenship is often exclusive. Having British citizenship could influence an individual's perception of an overseas country. BBCs Sophie, Hou and Lee who follow the political value of the British society find themselves in opposition to the Chinese state in relation to human rights, political disturbance in Beijing in 1989 and Tibetan issue. For overseas citizens, claiming citizenship in relation to another country restricts their national belonging to Britain and they are placed away from the 'British' home. Recent migrants Sally, Sarah and Rachael hence do not see Britain as a home in relation to citizenship and retain their attachment to the country of origin. The exclusive sense of citizenship reveals the political nature of belonging.

Apart from a transnational link, a translocal connection can be also constructed in the 'dance' between homes. Unlike national belongings which could exclude each other, most local belongings tend to coexist and connect without negating each other. Rachael from Belgium, for example, simultaneously attaches belonging to the house in Belgium and the 'BBC meets' in London which she often attends. For BBC Hou, both houses in Surrey and Hong Kong are his homes.

The informants' notion of home creates a link between Britain and overseas. Participants noted that belonging in Britain shapes perceptions of an overseas place. For many people such as recent migrant Sarah and BBC Pat, the rules in Britain may become 'natural' and 'normal' so a sense of unfamiliarity could be generated in relation to an overseas environment. On the other hand, an overseas belonging could inform belongings in Britain. People who came from different places of origin can have different homes in Britain. Those from Fujian province of China may go to '*Fujian associations*' (*Fat Tse*); many Hong Kong people find a home in the community organisations; and some BBCs may find a sense of belongingness in 'BBC meets'.

Sometimes home could be constructed at a continental level such as '*Asia*' (*Sophie Chow*) and '*Africa*' (*Lap Smith*). And the participants' notion of home may not always entail both transnational and translocal links. Hence, the idea of home is negotiated through complex intersections between places.

What needs to be noted is the role of a locality to put together multiple homes and to establish connections between spaces. In Lap's family home in Africa, various homes across Africa, Asia and Europe combine and intersect. For Hong Kong migrants, they install a Hong Kong TV channel in their house in Britain where homes in Britain and Hong Kong connect. Again in their house, some participants follow the custom of ancestor worship, which brings together the ancestral home China and the local home in Britain. And in a church in London, Christian participants put together their local and national belongings in Britain. These experiences of the participants suggest that a local belonging sustains a national belonging and transnational and translocal connections.

### **6.3.2 Shifting homes**

The 'dance' between homes not just creates various forms of interplay between spaces, but also constructs a shifting notion of home. As Stoller (2002) notes, a space is continuously negotiated and renegotiated. The participants' experiences suggest that their idea of home could shift through generations and during migration.

A generational change was suggested by some participants in relation to the idea of family home. Some individuals of the younger generation, both British and overseas born, argued that unlike their last generation, they are less likely to consider the parents' house as their home. This perception was explained by BBC Sophie who has just moved out of her parents' house after she bought a new flat:

*She [My mother] says here [the parents' house] is not our house; it's your house as well. ... But I think the fact that I move out I am segregated. This is the western way of thinking. (Sophie Chow- BBC, parents came from Hong Kong)*

Sophie echoed that not seeing the parents' house as their home shows their westernized identity. It was discussed in Chapter 4 that many participants assume that the young people of white British background leave the parental home when they are around twenty-one. So based on this assumption about the majority culture, Sophie and some other participants in their 20s and 30s consider it as 'western' that once they have grown up, 'family home' would not refer to the parents' house. As the generation who is more westernized, these young people see themselves having 'western' ideas of home while perceiving their older generation continue to maintain 'Chinese' perceptions of strong family connections.

The idea of where family home is appears to shift through generations, from an extended family to a nuclear family. This concurs with D'Angelo and colleagues (2010) who found that younger generation Chinese people are less involved in caring for their elders because of changing family structures and pressures of work. These might imply that the younger generation grown-ups have weaker bonds in relation to their extended family. This shifting notion of home informed by generation challenges the common notion that all Chinese have strong family bonds.

The changing notion of home, in addition, is demonstrated through the process of migration. Many migrant participants suggested that when they make new homes in Britain, their perception of previous homes is changed. But what is interesting is that this change has been pulled into two opposite directions. For those who migrated from a Chinese society, they suggested a weakened sense of belonging to the place of origin. But for those who migrated from a non-Chinese society, they could indeed strengthen their idea that the place of origin is their home. This finding questions Wang and Wong's (2007:185) argument that 'unavoidable' and 'deepen[ing]' ruptures would occur once migrants leave their place of origin.

The weakening sense of belonging to the place of origin was echoed by Sally who came from China seven years ago:

*Maybe because I have been here for long, I don't seem to always consider China as my home and here seems to become my second home. (Sally Yang)*

Having been here for seven years, Sally starts to see here as a home. As discussed in Chapter 5, she learns to openly express her emotions, which she assumed is a feature of mainstream culture. She finds a home in a Chinese church and Britain has become her cultural home. In the meantime, a sense of unfamiliarity has been created in relation to her previous home China. Some values and norms in that country become 'abnormal' for her which then generates a feeling of not being at home.

Participants from China also suggested a weakening sense of belonging to China in relation to citizenship. They implied that at an early stage of arrival, their belonging to the place of origin was strong, so their perception was shaped by the political agenda of that country. But such a belonging changes over time as Sally continued to recall:

*At the beginning I looked down on the refugees and asylum seekers (from China) because I felt they damage the pride of Chinese people. ... Now I think first of all they are human beings and then Chinese. ... Perhaps they felt China could not*

*satisfy their needs ... It's just the way they used was wrong or was not good enough. (Sally Yang)*

Attaching to China strongly as a Chinese citizen, Sally previously perceived herself as different from political migrants who are 'unwanted' by China. Gradually less influenced by the Chinese state, she perceives those people in a less politicized way. Her belonging to China has been weakened and her distance from those political migrants is lessened. But as long as Sally still considers such political migration as '*wrong*' or '*not good enough*', it could be that the Chinese state is still influential in shaping how she identifies.

A weakening sense of belonging to their origin, for people from a Chinese society, is often caused by their adoption of 'western' culture. For those who came from a non-Chinese society, strengthening belonging to their origins reflects their weakening belonging to the ancestral home China. Ching from Malaysia explained his change in the perceptions of China and Malaysia:

*In Malaysia ... you feel you are Chinese, quite China. ... After coming abroad ... they would feel it easier to communicate with people from their own country, Malaysia. ... Before, I would definitely think home is China. But now, it is definitely Malaysia. (Ching Tse)*

Being in Malaysia where the Chinese are the minority, Ching maintained his orientation to China in order to make sense of the idea that he was different in that society. However, coming to Britain where Ching meets people who migrated from China, he realizes his difference from these people. The idea that China is his home is then disrupted, and instead, the feeling that Malaysia is his home becomes stronger. Hence, the examples of Ching and Sally suggest that the shift in the idea of home through migration needs to take account of where an individual migrated from.

#### **6.4 Social organisations in the 'dance'**

The construction of the notion of home is driven by the participants' desire to make sense of their social situation, to feel safe in an environment, to feel they belong, and to obtain a sense of pride. These individual motivations of identification were discussed in the last chapter. It could be suggested that such personal circumstances shape the participants' identification in relation to both boundary and home. Meanwhile, identification is also influenced by various social organisations. Their roles have been highlighted in the construction of home so they will be discussed now.



It was discussed in Chapter 2 that the roles of the nation-state and family in shaping identifications require further investigation. Based upon this Chinese sample, the data suggest that their roles are still crucial. Through controlling immigration status, the British state has an impact on whether participants can claim a belonging to this country in relation to citizenship. And some informants, such as Sophie and focus group participants, also suggested that the UK state's acceptance of Chinese culture makes it possible for the Chinese to construct a blurry boundary, adopt mainstream culture and construct cultural homes here.

China, in addition, is considered by many participants as influential in the construction of Chineseness. Based on China's development, the participants took pride in their Chinese identity. And as they become more secure about their Chineseness, they seem to have more confidence in acquiring attributes of the host identity. This has been echoed by established Hong Kong migrant Peng, who observed that *'now we have the confidence to mix because China has become powerful'*. China's development, according to Ying, Peter and a few others, also encourages a positive response to Chinese culture from the mainstream, which facilitates boundary blurring of the Chinese. However, Pieke and colleagues (2004) note that China's increasing development is still constrained by the 'west'. We should acknowledge that China has now developed to an even higher level and it is beyond the scope of this study to analyze whether the constraints still exist. But some respondents such as Lap, Hou, Sarah and Amanda spoke of the idea of western supremacy and how it continues to encourage the Chinese to abandon Chinese rules and become 'westerners'. So it appears that the mentality of China being constrained by the 'west' remains influential even though economically it might not always be the case. Involving different nation-states, Chinese identity is constructed with the intersections and sometimes conflicts between political powers.

Apart from the state, family also plays a key role in the participants' identification. Its role seems to be so important that the participants portray strong family bonds as a common notion of Chineseness. Family is often linked to the practices of Chinese culture, particularly the language, food and festival celebrations. The negotiation of identity informed by generation, gender and partnering also usually takes place in a family. In relation to the negotiation of home, where family members reside can simply make that place a home. And such unpoliticized notions of home largely sustain some respondents' belonging to a country. Hence, families are crucial in shaping the constructions of boundary and home.

The informants' experiences, however, imply a possible change in the roles of nation-state and family. As echoed by Sally whose experience was discussed earlier, the influence of a nation-state could be weakened once people leave the country, even though these people may be still the citizens of that country. The generational shift in the notion of family home appears to imply a weakening sense of family bonds in relation to extended family, where the role of family in shaping identification could be questioned. Therefore, to what extent nation-state and family continue to be dominant in shaping the construction of Chineseness could be further explored in a future study. And it is also worth noting that some informants spoke of the involvement of some other social organisations in their identifications. Some recent migrants repeatedly mentioned the importance of churches in giving them a mainstream identity and a local home. Established migrants often talked about Chinese community organisations. BBC respondents perceive 'BBC meets' as an important part of Chinese identification. In light of these, it is probable that the roles of various social organisations could vary for each individual.

The illustration of the 'dance' of Chineseness will end with a case study of Lilly Hoang. Lilly's performance of Chinese identity will summarize what has been discussed in these three finding chapters: firstly, the common perception that all Chinese share the same group boundary and home; secondly, the construction of blurry boundary; thirdly, the negotiation between multiple homes; and finally, the influences of individual motivations and social organisations on the identification of Chineseness.

Lilly is a woman in her 30s. Along with her family, she came from Vietnam at the age of one to seek asylum in Britain. She now works as a professional in a Chinese organisation. This is how Lilly started telling me about her identity:

*I identify myself as Chinese and I just happen to live in Britain.*

*I am definitely Chinese and not Vietnamese, if that's what you are asking. (Lilly Hoang)*

Lilly is very sure about the distinctiveness of her Chinese identity. She has a fixed idea that she is Chinese and she is not British or Vietnamese. In her eyes, Britain and Vietnam are not her homes and being Chinese means that she is somehow connected to China. Based on these fixed notions of boundary and home, Lilly constructs a perception that, like any other Chinese, she is different from any non-Chinese. As she sees herself as an 'immigrant' in Britain, this shared notion of Chineseness makes

sense of her 'racial' and cultural differences in the host society. It provides her with a sense of security, belonging and pride for being Chinese in Britain.

While the shared notion of Chineseness draws out the essence of Chinese identity, the performance of this essence is dynamic. In Lilly's situational 'dance' of Chineseness, the constructions of boundary and home are multi-layered and fluid.

*I like Chinese food and English food, whereas people here (in this Chinese organisation) prefer Chinese food, definitely. That's a result of me growing up here.*

*I am kind of split down in the middle. (Lilly Hoang)*

The identification around food showcases the deconstruction of the fixed line between Chinese and the majority, and the construction of 'blurry' boundary (Alba, 2005:21). Lilly not just claims a Chinese identity, but also acquires some attributes of the majority group. Dual identities overlap in the ambiguous zone of the boundary. Based on the fact that she grew up in this country, she moves away from her 'audience', the established migrants who remain at the Chinese end of this ambiguous zone. Individual backgrounds hence inform their different locations at the blurry boundary of Chineseness, and the heterogeneity of the Chinese surfaces.

Lilly's negotiation of identities is further demonstrated in her notion of home:

*When people ask me where I am from ... I asked what do you mean, well I am from Southeast London; or do you mean where I am from, well my ancestors were from China; or what do you mean, I was born in Vietnam. (Lilly Hoang)*

A feeling of 'home but not really home' is implied by Lilly. As she further explained, 'too many homes' and 'I am homeless'. She negotiates her belonging to places at national and local levels, both in Britain and overseas. These homes entail 'racial' belonging, cultural identity or citizenship, which connect to construct her belongingness and 'homelessness' (Berger, 1984:64).

With regard to Vietnam, Lilly made the following statement:

*I suppose you identify yourself by where you were born and you are kind of having a legend to that. ... You feel a kind of attachment.*

*You expect that I would feel some kind of connection because I was going back to a place that I was born but actually I didn't which is strange. (Lilly Hoang)*

Since 'country of origin' has become an official way of categorizing people in the host country, for Lilly who spends most of her life in Britain, she thinks it is a '*legend*' to have a symbolic connection to Vietnam. However, she does not really follow a Vietnamese culture. The Chinese and western rules which are 'normal' for her become 'abnormal' in Vietnam. So a feeling of unfamiliarity occurred in relation to Vietnam. Vietnam is symbolically constructed as a home when she defines herself in Britain but becomes not a home when she is actually in that country.

About China:

*I have that attachment and loyalty to my roots which is China- I am Chinese.*

*But then again, I don't have that loyalty to China because ... obviously I don't agree with their politics.*

*I wouldn't feel at home in Beijing... whereas if I move to Teochew, I would feel at home because that's actually where I am from. I immediately switched to my British side and thought that China is Beijing, Beijing as China. (Lilly Hoang)*

The connection to China makes sense of Lilly's fixed notion of Chineseness. But China is only a 'racial' home for her. Her belonging to Britain in relation to citizenship shapes her perception of China, which showcases the political influence of identification. So due to the transnational connection between Britain and China, China is not Lilly's home in terms of citizenship.

A locality in China, Teochew in Canton Province, is identified by Lilly as where she is '*actually*' from. Through the practices of Chinese culture, this local home strongly sustains the national belonging to China. As she further described this home:

*Teochew people have a very strong sense of their identity. ... My dad says at home you speak Teochew. You know obviously people outside all speak Cantonese and now increasingly Mandarin. So I only spoke Teochew at home. (Lilly Hoang)*

The local language defines Lilly's belonging to this 'place of origin'. By speaking this language in the house in Britain, Lilly connects two local homes across continents, and this translocal link sustains her transnational identity. Due to the use of the local language and the connection to that local home overseas, Lilly again finds herself different from some other Chinese in London.

*I suppose we are all trying to find out about identity and how we identify ourselves, and I obviously come across Chinese, very Chinese. (Lilly Hoang)*

This is how Lilly concluded her 'dance' of Chineseness, a 'dance' where she constructs multiple identities and homes and yet holds on to the sense of essence for being Chinese. These contradictory yet coexisting identifications represent a common experience of the participants. From the performance of Chineseness, the shared notion of Chinese identity is explored and questioned.

### **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated the construction of multiple homes at national and local levels, in Britain and overseas. The participants' experiences suggest that based on 'racial' belonging, cultural identity or citizenship, their home can be in China, Hong Kong, another overseas country, Britain, a house, London, a Chinese community organisation, a church and Chinatown. These homes have developed far beyond the traditional Chinese idea of home - village of origin in China (Wang and Wong, 2007). This experience of 'homemaking' provides understanding of Blunt and Dowling's (2006) argument of multiple scales of home in the context of Chinese in London. The construction of home is closely associated with the negotiation of group boundary. These two elements of Chineseness interact to construct both the shared notion of Chineseness and the dynamic performance of identities.

Individual backgrounds shape the construction of homes. In light of their different places of origin and generations of migration, BBC participants tend to consider their primary home to be in Britain; some established migrants identify Britain as their home of citizenship and their place of origin as a cultural home; some recent migrants maintain the orientation to their country of origin as a primary home. In relation to religion, the Christian churches provide a local home for some migrant respondents especially those who are new to the society. In terms of class, the participants' income and housing status could shape the idea of home. Those who live on state benefits and social housing tend to consider their borough as a home whereas those who own their house see the house as a home. Generation could also inform the notion of home in terms of whether the parents' house is considered as a home.

'Dancing' between multiple homes, the respondents claim a common feeling that a space is a home but not really a home. In a sense, they negotiate a sense of belongingness from uncertainties. Tensions occur (Wang and Wong, 2007) where they encounter a feeling of insecurity, instability and 'homelessness' (Berger, 1984:64). But

for a few participants, the 'dance' leads to a development of a concrete idea of home. The 'dance' between homes is therefore complex, fraught with tensions and development.

Based upon the Chinese experience, this chapter showcases the connectedness of space in terms of national-local links, transnationalism (Pieke et al., 2004; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998) and translocality (Brickell and Datta, 2011; Appadurai, 1995, cited in Smith and Eade, 2009). It suggested that unlike national belongings which could exclude each other, local belongings tend to coexist. Echoing the note from Halilovich (2012) that local belonging is an important part of diasporic experience, this research further argues that a locality can put together other homes and facilitate the connectedness between these spaces. The idea of home could then shift through generations and in the process of migration. So the 'homemaking' is performed according to a specific circumstance and time.

The last section of this chapter explored the social circumstances that shape the construction of Chineseness. It argued that the nation-state is powerful in deciding individuals' citizenship and the Chinese state is influential in shaping the identity of Chinese diaspora. This Chinese experience stresses the political nature of identity (Anthias, 2001; Hall, 1993; Smith, cited in Brickell and Datta, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2003) and the role of 'home' state in shaping the identification. Family, in addition, constructs a belonging which is more relevant to everyday life, although the generational shift in the idea of family home raises a question on to what extent and how it continues to maintain and transmit Chineseness. The participants' experiences suggest that social organisations involved in shaping the construction of Chineseness are diversifying but nation-state and family are still crucial. Driven by the various social organisations and multiple individual motivations, the notion of Chineseness is defined and negotiated.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Based on a diverse sample of Chinese people living in London, this research has sought to respond to debates about the construction of ethnic identity. It was discussed in Chapter 2 that an ethnic minority is often considered as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006:6), who share a group boundary and a home (Brubaker, 2005). The Chinese according to Anderson (2006:6) are a 'classical community' having a strong sense of group identity based on notions of bloodline and culture. In contrast to this idea of a 'community', some studies suggest that members of minorities can proclaim multiple identities and feel at home anywhere (e.g. Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Brah, 1996). In relation to the Chinese, some researchers (Ong and Nonini, 2004; Leung, 2007; Pieke et al., 2004; Wang and Wong, 2007) demonstrate that they have multiple attachments to places. There are therefore debates about whether ethnic minorities are fixed 'communities' or if they have multiple attachments to cultures and places. Reflecting on those debates, this study explores how the Chinese define their identity and the extent to which they construct a shared notion of 'Chineseness'.

The key findings of this research suggest that the experience of being Chinese is a complex interplay between the seemingly 'bright' boundary of 'community' and the 'blurry' boundaries of multiple identities. It is a dynamic negotiation of these identities in different ways in different contexts. And it involves multiple attachments to different scales of home not just to the Chinese nation but also places across countries at national and local levels. The data show that individuals managed to simultaneously maintain a perception of an imagined Chinese community while at the same time accommodating multiple attachments to cultures and places. The metaphor of 'dance' was used to capture, analyze and demonstrate the dynamism of identifications. The reflexive methods of in-depth interviews and a focus group were able to reveal such shifting performance of the 'dance'.

### **7.1 From bright to blurry boundary, from one to multiple homes**

What I found interesting in this research was the participants' change of identification during our discussion. The participants often shifted from emphasizing a 'bright' boundary of Chineseness to revealing the 'blurry' boundaries of multiple identities, and

they changed from noting a shared home to suggesting that they have attachments to different places.

In the fieldwork, the participants usually started with presenting a homogeneous notion of Chineseness. They appeared to believe that all Chinese share distinctive features such as a connection with China, 'yellowness', bloodline, food, language, strong family bonds and image of Chineseness. These features might not be distinctively Chinese, but were perceived so in order to mark an apparently clear division between the Chinese and the 'others'. This shared notion of Chineseness suggests that the boundary of Chinese identity is 'bright' so individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on (Alba, 2005:22), and it implies that China is their home. It creates a sense of essence for being Chinese which was strongly emphasized by the participants.

Since I started our conversation by saying that the project was about Chinese identity, the participants might have tried to create an impression that they were Chinese, they were certain about what Chineseness is and therefore the notion of Chinese identity is clear and fixed. Also I can only speculate about whether their perceptions of distinctiveness were at all related to the fact that I am Chinese and from China. But as I was able to encourage the participants to explore these perceptions further, I carefully teased out more. The perception of Chinese 'community' then became a myth that they took less notice of as our discussions proceeded.

The participants in fact acquired multiple identities, constructing a 'blurry' boundary (Alba, 2005:21) where they 'danced' in the ambiguous zone and constantly negotiated the ideas of 'us' and 'them'. They believed 'racial' identity is fundamental to Chineseness which fits with Alba's (2005:21) notion of 'uncrossable' 'racial' boundary. Thus, they tend to present themselves as 'racially' Chinese but culturally they have multiple identities. Such a pattern of boundary blurring shared between these Chinese people adds to the growing body of literature examining what takes place in the ambiguous zone of ethnic boundary which seems to currently focus on mixed-descent (Eriksen, 2012). In addition, a few respondents also observed that Chinese culture interplays with 'westernness' in China. So it appears that what it means to be Chinese is 'blurry' both 'abroad' and in the 'homeland'.

Apart from multiple attachments to cultures, the participants also attached belongings to multiple spaces at national and local levels, in Britain and overseas. Among those homes, Chinatown was considered by the respondents as a recognizable site of



Chinese distinctiveness, a home away from home. It represents the Chinese 'community' and this symbolic meaning is deeply normalized so the participants and I as a Chinese person trusted that it is a cultural norm requiring no further explanation. This however does not override the role of Chinatown as a space where Chinese individuals negotiate differences from other Chinese which has been discussed in another study (Sales et al., 2011). In light of the diverse backgrounds of the participants, these Chinese people seemed to construct more scales of home compared with the Chinese in Malaysia (Ong and Nonini, 2004), Indonesian in Hong Kong (Wang and Wong, 2007), Taiwanese in America (Chang, 2002, cited in Wang and Wong, 2007), Chinese in Germany (Leung, 2007) and Fujian migrants in Europe (Pieke et al., 2004) (discussed in Chapter 2). The experience of the Chinese in London echoes Blunt and Dowling (2006) who suggest that people can construct multiple scales of home. The data has also argued that a home can entail multiple meanings, so the categorization of the meanings of home (e.g. Somerville, 1992; Wang and Wong, 2007) could overlook the complexity of 'homemaking' process.

Multiple scales of home interplayed with each other and constructed transnational and translocal connections. As reviewed in Chapter 2, literature has studied transnationalism as a multi-local process (e.g. Pieke et al., 2004; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Brickell and Datta, 2011) and highlighted the link between a locality and overseas. These studies seem to draw less attention to how connections within the country between local and national identities shape transnational experiences. The participants suggested that national belonging can be reliant on a local identity. People may not identify themselves as British because of citizenship, but adhere to a local identity which may at some point impact on their UK identity. In relation to an overseas country, their belonging to that country was also sustained by their link to a locality there (which was often the house of extended family). Hence, by putting together various national and local belongings, a locality sustains transnational and translocal links.

Literature on the Chinese tends to either refer to them as a community (e.g. Anderson, 2006:6; Cohen, 1997, cited in Sales et al., 2009) or demonstrate their multiple attachments to places (e.g. Ong and Nonini, 2004; Leung, 2007; Pieke et al., 2004; Wang and Wong, 2007); and it draws insufficient attention to the Chinese's multiple attachments to cultures. This study has argued that Chinese identification involves both aspects of holding on to a sense of an 'imagined community' and constructing multiple identities and homes. Examples have been illustrated, where established migrant Peng held on to a notion of an imagined Chinese 'community' based on orientation to a

homeland and image of hard-working. But meanwhile, this 60-year-old Hong Kong man suggested that Chinese people always adapt to the culture of where they reside and he is different from people from China. BBC Lee perceived that Black people, Whites and Asians can be British, but the Chinese can never be. He constructed a fixed line between the Chinese and others; but was also aware that *'it is very difficult to think'* whether he is British or Chinese, and he is not so 'Chinese' because Britain is his home in terms of citizenship and he has a White girlfriend. Rachael who recently came from Belgium asserted that western and Chinese are opposite and she is very 'Chinese' even in her choice of a partner. This clear notion of Chineseness was accompanied with her negotiation between multiple cultures and places where she saw people in Hong Kong as *'rude'* and felt warm in hearing 'her' Flemish in Belgium. Another respondent Lilly who came from Vietnam at the age of one identified herself as Chinese, definitely not British or Vietnamese. However, she could not get away from the fact that she was politically influenced by the *'British side'* of her identity and she felt *'a kind of attachment'* to her place of birth Vietnam. The coexisting elements of being a 'community' and having multiple belongings reflect what has been discussed in Chapter 1 that the Chinese in Britain are visible in demonstrating their cultural distinctiveness through Chinatowns and Chinese food, and yet they are invisible as a group in light of their absence from public life, residential scattering, mixed partnering and increasing diversity.

Exploring further the multiple attachments to cultures and places, this study has suggested that the participants celebrated their abilities to proclaim mainstream identity and make homes in London. And a few migrant participants such as Ching from Malaysia and Rachael from Belgium have developed a more concrete sense of home as they negotiate the idea of home through migration experience. This positive experience questioned Wang and Wong's (2007:185) argument that ruptures take place once migrants leave their place of origin and these ruptures are 'unavoidable' and 'deepen'. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of these positive experiences does not suggest that the participants can always move freely between places and cultures. As Song (2005) and Kofman (2005) argue independently, the negotiation of identities are far more constrained than suggested in the celebratory writings in the literature.

Similarly, I have argued that tensions occurred in the individual experiences of boundary blurring. This questioned Alba's (2005:25) comment that individuals 'do not sense a rupture' in boundary blurring as 'they are not forced to choose' between cultures. I have suggested that as the boundary of Chineseness is blurry, the social structure allows the Chinese to claim multiple identities. However, the participants did not always feel they fit

in either group. The boundary blurring argued by Alba (2005) in relation to a structural level does not fully reflect what takes place at an individual level where certain constraints are felt.

The participant data has also suggested tensions in the negotiation of home. I have addressed a notion of 'homelessness' (Berger, 1984:64), a departure from the construction of multiple homes that the literature concentrates on. The participants noted that as well as having attachments to various places, they do not necessarily feel at home. It has been illustrated that they often had only one home in relation to citizenship, so overseas citizens might not feel at home in Britain. Experience of forced migration sustained a detachment from belonging to the country from which they emigrated. And unfamiliar values and norms in both places of emigration and settlement detracted from a sense of belonging. Perceived as a cultural norm, furthermore, not possessing legal ownership of the house they live in created a feeling that the house is not their home. Citizenship, migration experience and home ownership hence impacted greatly on people's belonging to a place. And based on these factors, the participants' connection with place is complicated. Although these people started with a clear and fixed notion of home, home is different places for different people. A place of origin is not necessarily a home, and people who came from the same place could differ from each other based on their migration and socio-economic background. The narratives show how problematic the notion of diaspora is. We could not simply assume that the thing that most binds the diaspora together is an attribution of origin, as the concept of diaspora often implies (Anthias, 1998).

Considering the constraints in the negotiations of boundary and home, Song's (2005) note that people are not equally successful in accommodating multiple attachments to cultures and places is evident in relation to these participants who have different backgrounds and encounters. Building on some scholars' (e.g. Kofman, 2005; Kennedy, 2004; Werbner, 1999) argument that class influences individuals' flexibility between cultures and places, this small sample has illustrated that the influence of class could be complex.

The data suggested that class shapes the individuals' ability in claiming a mainstream identity. Those who have a low level of education tend to have a low level of English skills, and therefore limited capacity in engaging with the mainstream. Many of these people also work in the Chinese circle, which provides them with fewer opportunities in 'mixing' with 'others'. On the other hand, those who are well educated often speak fluent

English so they find it easier to adapt. Many of them are professionals working in the mainstream, so they adopt western rules on a daily basis. Having such impacts, class however does not have a strong influence on the individuals' maintenance of Chinese culture. Having a higher level of education or privileged employment does not necessarily strengthen an individual's capacity in retaining Chinese rules, and in fact, BBCs who have a high class status often have a low level of confidence in claiming Chinese identity.

In addition to the impact of class on the construction of mainstream identity, class also informs the participants' 'homemaking' in London. Those who own their house often referred to the house as their home, while those who live in social housing tended to attach belonging to their borough rather than the accommodation. So there seems to be a class dimension in the individuals' idea of where home is.

What is worth noting is that regardless of their differing cultural capital and economic resources, the participants somehow shared some constraints that stopped them from moving freely between different cultures and various places. Such constraints occurred to the British Born Chinese participants who do well socio-economically. Not acting very Chinese and having a weak connection to China led to a low level of confidence in Chinese identity. Recent migrant participants most of whom are well educated and financially secure had the urge to change and adapt because they did not feel 'normal' in the host society. The diversity of the Chinese in London questioned their original idea of Chineseness, and sometimes they became unfamiliar with the place where they recently came from. The established migrant respondents might have settled with families and they are considered resourceful by recent migrants. But these people were anxious about retaining Chinese identity; they saw themselves westernized but not fully accepted in Britain. Apart from most participants in the focus group who speak no English, have a low level of education and receive mean-tested benefits; many in this study speak both Chinese and English, have a university degree and are self-sufficient. But their privileged status did not stop them from facing tensions in the identification like the less privileged. So in a sense, the class dimension in shaping multiple identities and homes becomes less significant for these Chinese people.

In light of the fixed notion of Chineseness, multiple identities and homes, and constraints while moving between cultures and places, it has been noted that the experience of being Chinese in London is a complex negotiation of identities. The dynamism of identifications argued by Song (2005) and Barber (2011) is therefore not unique to

British born people. My research goes further by showing that such dynamism is experienced by the participants who come from various countries including China.

This study has applied the term 'dance' to capture the participants' dynamic identifications. The use of this term is informed by the very useful concepts of 'positionings' (Song and Parker, 1995:244) and 'performance' (Goffman, 1959:22). 'Dance' suggests the shifting movements of moving back and forth, moving together and against each other. It enabled me to follow the movements of individuals by visualizing their locations in respect to boundaries and homes. The 'dance' also illustrated how participants performed different dances to different audiences, constructing fluid performance of identification. Those analyses echoed Yuval-Davis's (2003) comment in a macro level study that diasporic belonging is multi-layered, shifting and dynamic, and the 'dance' made such dynamism come to life.

In the 'dance' of Chineseness, participants negotiate their identity in relation not only to non-Chinese, but also to other Chinese people. While they constructed a notion of Chinese 'community', the audience were mostly the non-Chinese and the participants assumed that they agree with their notions of difference. However, as the participants performed their complex identification in everyday lives, the audience largely involved other Chinese. It was discussed that recent migrant Ching realized Malaysia is his home and China is not really a home after interacting with people from China. Some established Hong Kong migrants generated ideas of 'us' and 'them' in relation to Chinese people from Fujian who speak a different dialect and British Born Chinese who have turned into 'ghost's character' (a westerner) according to these migrants. British Born Chinese Hou, who stayed one year in China, negotiated his idea of being Chinese in London in comparison with students from China. And Lap, a man of Chinese and English descent who considered himself as British Born Chinese, had low confidence in his Chinese identity as he even had to distance himself from other BBCs. It was through their commonalities and differences with other Chinese people that the participants' position in the ambiguous zone of Chinese boundary became clear, and the ideas of home and 'not home' were made sense of. As reviewed in Chapter 2, literature on identity (e.g. Wallman, 1978; Zolberg and Long, 1999; Alba, 2005; Anthias, 2001) defines ethnic identity based on differences between an ethnic group and 'others'. This research goes further by suggesting that studying the notion of ethnic identities needs to take into account the identification between group members.

The negotiations of identity in the 'dance' of Chineseness are shaped by individual backgrounds notably including place of origin, generation of migration, religion, sexuality, gender and partnering. Place of origin and generation of migration play a crucial role in the identification, and due to individuals' difference in these backgrounds, the participants suggested that Chinese people in London are commonly subgrouped into established migrants, recent migrants and British Born Chinese. This study tackled Chinese identification in relation to religion, sexuality, gender and partnering. It has observed that Christianity enabled some respondents to move to the 'other' end of the ethnic boundary and adopt a mainstream identity, while Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism placed some other participants at the Chinese end and strengthened their Chinese identity. The data also suggest Tweed's (2006) contention that religion makes homes for diaspora is evident in relation to the recent migrant informants, who felt at home in Britain because they are Christian. In addition, this study has extended the understanding of the impact of sexuality on Chinese identification. Although it was based on the story of one participant Ching and the observations of a few others, the influence of sexuality was significant in those narratives. Those accounts suggested that some Chinese people perceive homosexuality as more accepted by the majority group. So when a Chinese person is gay, those participants suggested that this person places themselves and is placed by other Chinese to be at the 'other' end of the Chinese boundary.

Furthermore, building on a wider literature on gender (e.g. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Ryan, 2010), this study has focused on the impact of gender on Chinese identification. It extends existing knowledge about gender discourses on Far East Asian groups in Western societies which are relatively under research. In addition to Yuval-Davis's (1997:37) observation that 'women's membership is of a double nature', I have noted that men also have a specific duty in maintaining Chinese identity. The participants suggested that while women are given more rules to retain Chinese culture, men are strongly required to make sure that their partner is Chinese. This norm implies that it is the men who are responsible for passing on the perceived 'racial' characteristics of Chineseness. So with regards to partnering, it becomes more acceptable for women than men to be in a mixed partnership, married or unmarried. A similar perception has been reported by Hsu and Ip (2006) in relation to Taiwanese people in Australia. This gendered attitude to mixed partnering is arguably consistent with results from the Labour Force Survey in Britain. The results suggest that Chinese women have a higher rate of mixed marriage than men, making the Chinese different from most other ethnic groups; and Chinese women have the highest rate of mixed

marriage of all ethnic groups and gender, only second to the mixed population (Coleman, 1994; Muttarak, 2004; Luk, 2008; Platt, 2010). Apart from Song (2009) who suggests a link with a perception of oriental men being seen as sexually undesirable, studies have not given sufficient explanations for this Chinese phenomenon; and in fact, Coleman (1994; see also Luk, 2008; Muttarak, 2004) has pointed out the difficulty in explaining it. We may learn from experiences of the Chinese in other countries such as America where the same pattern of mixed marriage has taken place (Muttarak, 2004). However, this is a complex issue which is beyond the scope of this research to tackle and future research would be needed.

Individual backgrounds tend to intersect and overlap, shaping a complex 'dance' of Chineseness. The experience of being Chinese could therefore vary from person to person. Examples have been given through the stories of recent migrants Rachael and Ching, established migrants Amanda and Fat, and BBCs Lee and Sophie. The narratives demonstrated these participants' differing experiences of being Chinese underpinned by their common categorization of Chinese subgroups.

The discussions of individual backgrounds suggested that the influence of these backgrounds can be so significant that they become more important than 'ethnic identity' in the participants' ordinary lives. Since this research is about Chineseness, ethnic identity inevitably became the centre of respondents' concern. But it does not mean that ethnicity is always significant. Ching, the gay man, considers sexuality as the most important aspect of his life. And for that, he did not mind leaving Malaysia, leaving his job in banking, working as a waiter in London, and even confronting his Chinese colleagues in the restaurant and losing the only source of income in London. For recent migrants Sarah and Sally who have converted to Christianity, their life in Britain is largely centred around religion. According to BBC Lee, a class dimension rather than ethnicity is crucial when he interacts with his white girlfriend.

So in addition to Zolberg and Long's (1999:8-9) categorization of boundary 'crossing', 'blurring' and 'shifting', I have proposed a form of boundary 'fading' and argued that 'ethnic identity' can 'fade' into the background as other facets of identity such as sexuality, religion and class become more salient in certain circumstances. This suggests that there is not just a boundary of ethnic identity, but also boundaries of sexuality, religion and class. This research has raised the importance of considering other aspects of social background as a dimension of identity in the study of ethnic boundaries, which generally seem to assume that ethnicity is the predominant boundary.

It draws attention to the situational construction of boundaries, and the visibility and invisibility of ethnic minorities in different contexts. Further research would be needed to explore how for 'visible minorities' (such as the Chinese) the boundary of ethnic identity can become faded, who the boundary is fading for, and whether the boundary of ethnic identity should be faded in the multi-ethnic society.

This study has looked into social and personal factors behind the 'dance' of Chineseness. It has raised the importance of 'home' state in shaping identity, which tends to be downplayed in the literature (Sales et al., 2011). China as an imagined homeland sustains a shared notion of Chineseness. As China becomes a major economic power in the world, participants who were born in different states are willing to make connections with this symbolic home as it increases their confidence in being Chinese. The participant data question Ong and Nonini's (2004:9) contention that China is 'primal source and centre ... of "Chinese culture"'. The discussions highlighted that China is not necessarily the only reference point of Chinese cultural practices because the majority of these people have always lived outside China. What China truly is for them, however, is the source and centre of their 'racial' belonging, an essential element of identity considered by them to be 'uncrossable' and unchangeable. In addition to this shared notion of 'racial' identity, the connection to the Chinese state can generate differences between the Chinese. As illustrated, those who are Chinese citizens made certain links with the Chinese state while others connected to other states, and such a difference referred to cultural belonging and citizenship rather than a 'racial' identity.

To study the personal factors that influence the individuals' identification, I have combined the notions of 'normality' (Goffman, 1972:49) and 'needs' (Maslow, 1943:373) in the analysis. Neither of these concepts was used originally to address ethnic identities, but they are useful for understanding the social-psychological background of people's identifications. By applying these combined concepts, I analyzed how the Chinese participants made themselves 'normal' in the host society and in doing so how they negotiated identities to accommodate various 'needs'. I suggested that in the process of obtaining normality as Chinese people in London, the participants seek to satisfy the needs for security, love and esteem. Maslow (1943) notes that when needs at a lower level are dominant, those at higher levels become less important for an individual to satisfy. So when the needs for security, love and esteem are dominant, it restricts the motivations of self-reflection and self-actualization which are the highest level of needs according to Maslow (1943). This explains why people do not always reflect on ethnic norms but tend to follow them 'naturally' as some respondents suggested.



Identity is fundamentally based on difference (Wallman, 1978), so the idea of division is central to this concept. I would see ethnic identity as a social function that sustains social division. Hence for the participants, although identity provides a sense of certainty, such certainty reflects a social structure that requires them to fit into a category, into a ticking box and into an order. As they tend to follow these orders with less reflection, identity could sometimes create a wall and stop them from thinking and acting beyond the current structure of categorization. It has been illustrated in Sophie's story that she considered cultural expectations of being Chinese and Malaysian Chinese as a reason for not being able to get along with either her Chinese or white boyfriend. As Sophie held on to a sense of ethnic identity, she felt that she could never be successful in her relationship. Lee's uncle stopped communicating with his son, only because the son is gay. The uncle believed homosexuality is forbidden in the Chinese community and as Chinese they are required to follow this norm. Family relations therefore gave way to maintaining the expectation of being Chinese. As some participants observed, mixed partnering and homosexuality are increasingly common in contemporary society, and London has many different people with diverse backgrounds and experiences. So putting themselves in a cultural and 'racial' category may stop the participants from accepting what is not acceptable or understandable in their 'group', and restricts their flexibility in the diverse society. This study has questioned the literature which considers ethnic identity as beneficial in a way that it protects group members from uncertainties and social exclusion (Hall and Gay, 1996; Castles and Miller, 2009). The data suggest that, for some individuals, such a group identity could sometimes become a restriction and reduce their capacity to adapt. In addition to Anthias and Yuval-Davis's (1992) similar observation in relation to women and ethnic minorities, this study argues that men may also experience some pressures and restrictions from ethnic norms.

To conclude, this study has demonstrated the complex 'dance' of Chineseness. Concerning the dynamic negotiations of boundaries and homes, there is no reason to believe that this experience of the Chinese participants cannot be shared with other diasporas. Guided by Zolberg and Long (1999) and Alba's (2005) studies of boundary, the illustration of boundary negotiation has added to the macro level research, by demonstrating an interplay between bright and blurry boundaries and constraints in boundary blurring. Informed by the notions of 'performance' (Goffman, 1959:22) and 'positionings' (Song and Parker, 1995:244), the metaphor of the 'dance' was useful in exploring the dynamic negotiation of identities, a performance constructed in relation not just to the non-Chinese but also to other Chinese people. To obtain an insight into the

individual motivations of identifications, I have combined the concepts of ‘needs’ (Maslow, 1943:373) and ‘normality’ (Goffman, 1972:49), suggesting that the domination of the needs for security, love and esteem and the restriction on self-actualization explain the taken-for-granted nature of ethnic identities.

There are some aspects of this study which are specifically relevant to the Chinese. Firstly, China’s current position in the world provides an important background and impact of the contemporary definition of Chineseness. The role of this ‘home’ state is indispensable for the discussion of Chinese identity. Secondly, Chinatown is a space that sustains an idea of an imagined community. This study has not discussed about Chinatown in length, but it in a way reflects the taken-for-granted aspect of such a Chinese space. Thirdly, the connection between home ownership and the idea of home suggested by some respondents may not be shared with other cultures. Fourthly, the participants see it as a norm for the Chinese to adopt mainstream culture in order to achieve financial success. In a sense, financial achievement is arguably central to the adaptation of the Chinese diaspora, who are considered as a classic ‘trade diaspora’ (Cohen, 1997, cited in Sales et al., 2009:5). Lastly, men’s stronger duty in having an intra-cultural partnership might not be emphasized by other groups. The discussions drew attention to the significant pattern of mixed partnering in relation to the Chinese, where women have a higher rate of mixed partnering than men. There is no sufficient data in this study to address the impacts of Chinese culture and gender on such a pattern of mixed partnering. But because this Chinese pattern is opposite to most other ethnic groups and I am personally involved in a mixed relationship, I am extremely interested in pursuing this issue further.

## **7.2 Researching a diverse sample**

This research drew on the lived experiences of twenty-two Chinese people in London. Unlike most research on the Chinese in Britain which has studied subgroups of the Chinese, this project involved a diverse range of Chinese people with different backgrounds and experiences. The participants vary in terms of employment, education and housing status. There is a fairly even balance in numbers related to gender, age and time in the UK. The participants include established migrants, recent migrants and British Born Chinese. They were born in different places (e.g. UK, Hong Kong, China and Belgium); either born and bred here, or migrated at different ages (from 1 to 60s) for economic, political, study or family purpose. The migration paths of their family are

complex, involving various countries across Africa, Europe and Asia. They have different experiences especially in terms of migration history and social conditions and encounters in London. The sample hence reflects the diversity of Chinese population in London which strongly questions a shared notion of Chineseness. It was from this diverse sample that Chinese identification was explored.

The ability to recruit a variety of participants benefited from my background as a Chinese person who has personal and professional contacts with different types of Chinese people in London. I am a recent migrant, and I have worked in and with Chinese community organisations in London where the majority of members and staff are established migrants. Through those contacts, I also got to know many British Born Chinese. So I was in a good position to gain access to a wide range of Chinese people, obtain their trust and understand their different experiences.

Apart from English, I was able to use the most common Chinese dialects (Cantonese and Mandarin) and both forms of written Chinese (simplified and traditional Chinese) in the fieldwork. Since language is a key factor that distinguishes Chinese population in London, the use of these languages and dialects was crucial for facilitating access, recruitment and data collection. When I introduced the project to potential participants, I spoke in their first language and where needed presented an information leaflet in the most appropriate written form. It reduced gaps and created a sense of acceptance and trust between the participants and me as we were able to communicate without language barriers. As I collected demographic information of the participants prior to the interviews and focus group, I provided the questionnaires in three written forms (English, simplified Chinese and traditional Chinese). It enabled the participants to choose a version and understand and answer the questions in their first language. Learning from Song and Parker's (1995) observation that speaking in participant's second language in a face-to-face discussion may limit their exploration of views and experiences, I was able to reduce this limitation to the lowest level. Speaking in a language that the participants felt comfortable with and fluent with strengthened their capacity in telling and making their stories in the fieldwork. It largely enabled them to explore their rich experiences of identification.

Having data in three different languages, however, demanded extra efforts in translating, transcribing and analysis. I made sense of the narratives in both Chinese dialects and incorporated different ways of expression into this piece of work in English. I have

gained more understanding and awareness of how knowledge was created through different languages and dialects, and I have improved my English as a second language.

I was involved in other research (Lin, 2007; Lam et al., 2009; Sales et al., 2009) on Chinese migration and London Chinatown. It provided me with knowledge and research experiences from which I developed this project. I was also equipped with interviewing skills, thanks to my education in social work and social research. It may be taken for granted that a qualitative researcher ought to have interviewing skills, but I would like to acknowledge these skills as I believe they contributed largely to the exploration of in-depth experiences.

The participants of this study were living in London, a city with the largest and most diverse Chinese population in Britain and one of the most established Chinese 'communities' in Europe (Sales et al., 2009). I can only speculate about whether the London experience is distinctive or representative (or both in different perspectives), because this would require comparisons with further research on the Chinese in other places. But London undoubtedly lends itself to offering an answer to the arguments about community and multiple attachments to cultures and places. Building on Hatziprokopiou's (2009) argument that London provides ordinary spaces to construct multiple identities, this study has noted that such multiple attachments seemed to co-exist with a sense of an 'imagined community' that individuals hold on to in this cosmopolitan city.

The diverse sample of respondents took part in in-depth interviews and a focus group. The focus group collected narratives of established Chinese migrants who are more difficult to recruit for interviews and have rich and lengthy knowledge of Chineseness in London. Interviews explored the personal stories of being Chinese and their rich and in-depth experiences became the main source of data. The way these methods encouraged the participants to explore their experiences echoed what Mason (2002) suggests about their suitability in studying meanings of social world through providing a social situation close to everyday social interactions and conversations. The interaction in our research relationships created another 'dance' of Chineseness. The 'dance' suggested that physical appearance, language, personal relationship and the idea of home were the key features that marked our Chinese identity, and it revealed that diasporic background, education and gender shaped our shifting identifications. These identifications in the research fieldwork reflected and added understanding of the participants' negotiation of Chineseness in everyday lives.

### **7.3 Our joint 'dance'**

This study is our joint 'dance', performed by the participants, my supervisors and me. I am pleased that many participants considered their involvement to be beneficial in one way or another. Some were happy that they explored their identity that they sometimes wondered about; some wanted their voice heard; and some considered the research as an experience to reflect on their identity.

For me, a valuable part of this study is the opportunity to learn from my supervisors. They have set up role models for me, a student in the academia. They have also added dimensions to this research based on their personal experiences which might be played out differently by a Chinese supervisor. As white scholars, they engaged personal views in this study and challenged my perceptions of Chineseness. They guided me to step aside as an 'outsider' reviewing and rethinking the participants' notion of Chinese identity which I had taken for granted. My English supervisor Rosemary particularly challenged my deterministic notions of the English. It made me aware of the heterogeneity of the majority group. As Irish migrants, two of my supervisors Mary and Louise shared some perceptions with me a migrant in this country. It made me look at commonalities between ethnic groups and heterogeneity of the Chinese. Furthermore, my supervisors are open to different cultures and this has provided me with strong support in various ways. Their interest in and respect for Chinese culture encouraged me to explore Chineseness. Their multiple identities became my first-hand information on multiple identities of people living in London, not just the Chinese. This always reminded me of debates about community and multiple attachments to cultures and places, and motivated me to connect and compare the Chinese context to a bigger picture.

My supervisors were hence professionally and personally involved in this study. My 'dance' with them, often but not solely performed in our memorable meeting place British Library, collected a valuable memory of my PhD experience and a path of my development guided by them. So the 'dance' of Chineseness is co-constructed not just by me a researcher in the field, but also my supervisors, who are behind the scene yet important in the interpretation and generation of knowledge.

All these years, this study has developed my academic and personal paths. The biggest academic challenge I faced was with the change of research focus. The initial research topic – the cohesion and division in the Chinese ‘community’ – was easier for me to handle. Based on my knowledge and research experiences on social network and migration, the topic was set up to find out social interaction between Chinese people and the notion of ‘community’. However, under the surface of those interactions, the participants’ narratives led to a strong focus of Chinese identification, which the initial topic could not well address. As I reflected in my notes at the early stage of fieldwork, ‘the interaction between Chinese does not seem to be deeply discussed; why is that?’ Thematic analysis guided me to capture the key theme of the narratives. But it required courage to change research focus from one that I was familiar with to one that was new to me. This change required me to explore a whole new area of literature, engage it with the interpretation of research data, and finally make a contribution to the field. I am glad that, with my supervisors’ support, I was able to enhance my learning skills, make this transition, enter the participants’ world of Chinese identity, and develop the knowledge.

I am glad, not only because I have developed myself in an unfamiliar research area, but also because this subject has guided me through my personal development. As a researcher who was relatively new to Britain, I found it easier to just dig into the participants’ social world and learn about their experience of being Chinese in London. But given that I am Chinese and from China, researching my own ‘community’ in London involved confrontation and negotiation. Some examples have been discussed throughout the thesis. It has been noted that when I interviewed established Hong Kong migrant Ying, I experienced conflicts due to our different perceptions of China. In the eyes of BBC Sophie, I was first identified as a new arrival that was not as successful as her, and that perception shifted as our discussion proceeded. I was perceived by recent migrant Rachael as different from her given that she came from Belgium and I came from China. Although she asserted she is very ‘Chinese’, she constantly said ‘sorry’ to me because she had less confidence in Chineseness compared with me. My encounters with a variety of Chinese people were closely related to my personal backgrounds. These interactions may be shaped differently if the study was undertaken by a Chinese researcher who is an established migrant or a British Born Chinese, or by a non-Chinese or mixed-descent scholar. During the study, I truly enjoyed my ‘dance’ with these Chinese people because that allowed me to learn about their ‘dance’ of Chineseness and encouraged me to rethink my identity.

Reading through my research field notes, I can picture how I have improved my perception throughout this project. After a discussion with the key informant at the early stage of fieldwork, I wrote down in the notes that I was 'lost'. Being taught in China that Chinese people are unified no matter where they dwell, I was 'upset' because the key informant told me that the Chinese always keep distance from each other. As the study went on, my Chinese identity has been gradually reflected on. Now I have developed myself a long way from where I started, and certainly this will continue to inform my development in future research career.

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## **Appendix 1. A selection of research field notes**

26 April 2009

Attending a church in Central London

Background-

I met Sarah (pseudonym) in Sep 2008 in the Chinese embassy when I went to collect my renewed Chinese passport. She went to collect her passport too. Both being a student from China (she is from Guangxi) built up trust between us. On our way to Oxford Circus tube station, she told me that she is a Christian and I mentioned to her that I need to visit religious places for my study. So she invited me to attend their church.

Sarah occasionally sent me a text to invite me for the church visit. My visit was however postponed several times due to different reasons. Eight months later (today), I finally visited the church.

What I saw-

The service started 10 minutes before I got to the church. Opening the door of the hall where the service took place, I saw people singing, standing, waving hands; and some were even shaking as they were so touched. It reminded me of what Tweed (2006) notes about religion providing a home for diaspora.

What I felt-

Immersing myself in several church songs in Mandarin Chinese, I was embraced by a strong feeling of being 'at home'. It's the first time that I realized songs in my first language could bring me such a strong sense of belonging.

20 May 2009

A discussion with the key informant

Today, after the discussion I feel a bit lost as I do not know where I am going for this research. Describing in a historical way, the key informant told me that Chinese people in Britain do not need to be unified. The reasons he gave were that the Chinese do not have social struggle with the wider society, and instead there is competition among them due to business.



Objectives of my research-

I start to challenge the meaning of doing this research. I ask myself: if there is no such a notion of 'community', what are the objectives of my research, and why do I do this research. Maybe I can understand more about Chinese diaspora. So I have now found the meaning of doing this research!

The role of researcher-

I realize the reason why I am upset is because I wanted to look at how and why Chinese people abroad (in London) can be unified, but from the key informant's point of view, unification does not seem to exist. I have this intention because I am Chinese from China. I am strongly influenced by the education and politics in that country which emphasize on unifying Chinese people no matter where they dwell. As Chinese philosophy says, conflicts always exist. I shouldn't have expected the Chinese population to be a unified group without differences and divisions.

18 Sep 2009

Benefits of using interviews

Today, I attended a conference ('Thinking about mixedness and mixing: international and interdisciplinary dialogue') at London South Bank University. I was inspired by Miri Song's presentation where she presented the benefits of using interviews to collect data.

Coming back from the conference, I start to think about my research. The interview with Tee comes to my mind. When he completed his demographic questionnaire, he ticked 'student' in the question of 'occupation'. That was written down in accordance with his immigration status. However, in the interview where there was trust between us, he disclosed the fact that he worked full-time in a Chinese take-away.

3 Nov 2009

Today, I discussed some preliminary findings with my supervisors. Here are some thoughts:

Gender and partnership-

It seems to be more common to see a partnership of non-Chinese man and Chinese woman, and less common to see Chinese man and non-Chinese woman. Why?

Social interaction-

The interaction between Chinese people does not seem to be deeply discussed. Why is that? Is it in relation to factors such as language and generation? Is it a cultural difference? I should explore it in the upcoming interviews.

29 Jan 2010

Today on my way home, I noticed two Chinese girls sitting behind me on the bus. I couldn't stop listening to them, although I was preparing to listen to my iPod. Those people were students from China. Listening to their 'pure' Mandarin, I felt so much 'at home'. It felt like being in a bus in Beijing, although I could hear some people speaking English in the background. This imagined sense of 'home', a feeling of familiarity, actually made me happy.

1 Oct 2012

I phoned home today and found out that it was Moon Festival yesterday. My family (in China) would be happier if I called them yesterday, but they did not blame me because they said I have already become a 'foreigner'.

## Appendix 2. Demographic information of interviewees

Ref	Name	Gender	Age	Place of birth	Reason of migration	Legal status	Years in the UK	Languages*	First Language*	Language in interview *	Education	Housing	Living area
I9	Pat Man	Male	20+	UK	N/A	British citizen	20+	C, E	E	C	Undergraduate	Owned	N14
I10	Sarah Chen	Female	20+	China	Study	Student	4.5	E, C, M	C	C	Vocational training	Privately rented	NW2
I11	Sally Yang	Female	20+	China	Study	Student	7	E, C, M	C	C	Undergraduate	Privately rented	Lewisham
I12	Ching Tse	Male	30+	Malaysia	Travel	Student	6	E, C, M, F	M	M	Undergraduate	Privately rented	N17
I13	Peter Cheung	Male	50+	Vietnam	Refugee	British citizen	20+	E, C, M, H, V	C	C	Postgraduate	Social housing	Greenwich
I14	Cali Lam	Female	20+	HK	Family reunion	Dependant	2	E, C, M	C	C	Postgraduate	Privately rented	E16
I15	Amanda Xiao	Female	30+	China	Study	Indefinite leave to remain	16	E, M	M	M	Postgraduate	Owned	Barnet NW4
I16	Rachael Wong	Female	20+	Belgium	Employment	EU passport	4.5	E, C, M, H, FL	H	E	Undergraduate	Privately rented	E14
I17	Ying Song	Female	50+	HK	Employment	Indefinite leave to remain	16	C, M	C	C	Secondary school	Privately rented	Wandsworth
I18	Lap Smith	Male	20+	UK	N/A	British citizen	20+	E, C	E	E	Undergraduate	Owned	Barnet N20
I19	Hou Chan	Male	20+	UK	N/A	British citizen	20+	E, C, M, H	E	E	Undergraduate	Privately rented	Tower Hamlets E1
I20	Sophie Chow	Female	20+	UK	N/A	British citizen	20+	E, C, M, F	E	E	Postgraduate	Owned	Barnet NW4
I21	Lee Sung	Male	20+	UK	N/A	British citizen	20+	E, C	E	E	Undergraduate	Privately rented	Hammersmith
I22	Lilly Hoang	Female	30+	Vietnam	Asylum	British citizen	32	E, C, M	E	E	Postgraduate	Owned	Greenwich

\* Code of language: C- Cantonese, E- English, F- Fujian dialect, H- Hakka, M- Mandarin, V- Vietnamese, FL- Flemish

## **Appendix 3. Discussion guide - focus group**

### **1. Meanings of the ‘Chinese community’:**

There are many Chinese people in London. How do you name the Chinese?

When people mention the ‘Chinese community’, what do you understand by that?

Do you think there is such a thing as the Chinese community?

What does being Chinese mean to you?

#### **‘華人社區’的涵義**

倫敦有好多的華人，你怎樣稱呼華人這個團體？

當人們說‘華人社區’的時候，你覺得它指的是什麼？

你覺得有沒有所謂的‘倫敦華人社會/社區’？

對於你來說，作為‘華人’代表什麼？

### **2. Development of the ‘community’**

What are the main issues concerned for the Chinese population?

In the recent years, is there anything new in the ‘community’?

What are the roles of policy makers, institutions and Chinese people in shaping these issues?

How do these issues affect you?

#### **‘社區’的發展**

現在華人最關注的問題是什麼？

近年來‘社區’里面有沒有新的變化？

在這些問題及變化中，政府、社會機構及社團/華人的角色是怎樣的？

這些問題及變化怎樣影響你？

### **3. Identity and boundary**

What are the differences between recent and established Chinese migrants? How about similarities?

Who do you think belongs to the ‘Chinese community’? Are there any groups who feel they do not belong? Do you feel you belong?

#### **認同及界限**

你覺得新到的華人與在這裡住了很久的華人有什么不同？有什麼類似的？

你覺得哪些人屬於‘華人社區’？有沒有哪些人會覺得自己不屬於‘華人社區/社會’？你覺得自己屬不屬於‘華人社區’？

#### **4. Spatial/ Symbolic community**

Where is the Chinese community?

Do different types of Chinese people meet in these place(s)? How is their interaction?

Are you involved in the community?

If yes, where is it/ are they? If no, is there any group you think you belong to?

#### **地域/意義社區**

華人社區在哪里？

在華人（地域）社區里，不同的華人是不是會見到面？他們的關係怎樣？

你有沒有覺得自己屬於哪個/些（地理）社區？

如果有，他們在哪里？如果沒有，你有沒有覺得自己屬於哪個團體？

## **Appendix 4. Discussion guide - individual interview**

### **1. Identity and Boundary**

What does being Chinese mean to you? How is this meaning built up and changed?

What contacts do you have with Chinese people? How are the relationships built up, kept and changed?

To what extent did you choose your Chinese contacts?

How does British culture affect your life?

作为华人代表着什么？这个意义是如何形成、改变的？

你同华人有什么接触？这些关系如何建立、保持、改变？

你在怎样的程度上选择这些接触？

英国的文化怎样影响你的生活？

### **Gender, class and religion**

What is the expectation of your role in terms of gender, class and religion?

Have they changed?

How do these perceptions affect your relationship with Chinese people?

你在性别、阶层及宗教的角色期望如何？

这些期望变化过吗？

这些观点如何影响到你与华人的关系？

### **2. Commonality and Difference**

What are in common amongst Chinese population in London?

What are the differences?

伦敦华人有什么相似、不同？

### **Orientation to a 'homeland'**

Where are you from?

Where do you feel 'at home'? Do you feel 'at home' in London?

For overseas-born: When you go to your place of origin, do you feel at home?

For BBC: How do you see the place where your parents/grandparents came from?

What contacts do you have with people from the same origin of yours? How are the relationships built up, kept and changed?

你是哪里人？

你觉得哪里是你的家？伦敦是你的家吗？

移民：当你回到移民出发地的时候，你觉得那里完全是你的家吗？

BBC：你怎么看你先人移民出发的地方？

你与来自相同地方的人有什么联系？这些联系如何建立、保持、改变？

### **3. Spatial community and symbolic community**

Do you have any contacts with Chinese community organisations/ religious places?

If yes, how are the contacts?

你与华人社区、宗教社团是否有联系？关系如何？

### **Personal networks and formal version of community**

If you need support, who would you go for help?

What kinds of people are your neighbours (e.g. ethnicity etc)? How is your relationship with them?

Are your Chinese contacts based in your residential area? If yes, what are the activities you have with them? If no, how did you build up and maintain these contacts?

如果你需要帮助，你会向谁寻求支持？

你的邻居是什么人（种族等）？你们的关系怎样？

你的华人朋友是否在你的区？如果是，你们在一起一般做什么？如果不是，你们的关系是怎么建立和维持的？